JOUR COMICS

WONDER! ワンダー

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Akira Kawa

2

JOUR COMICS

WONDER! ②

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AKIRA KAWA

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WONDER!

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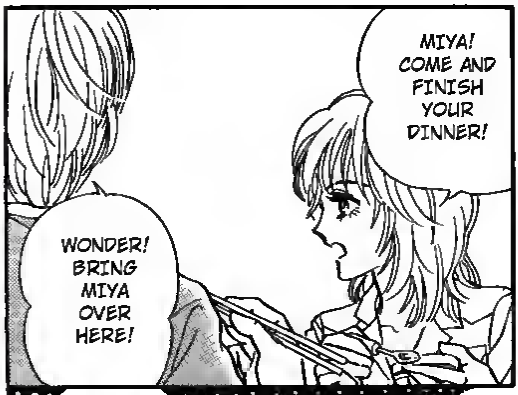
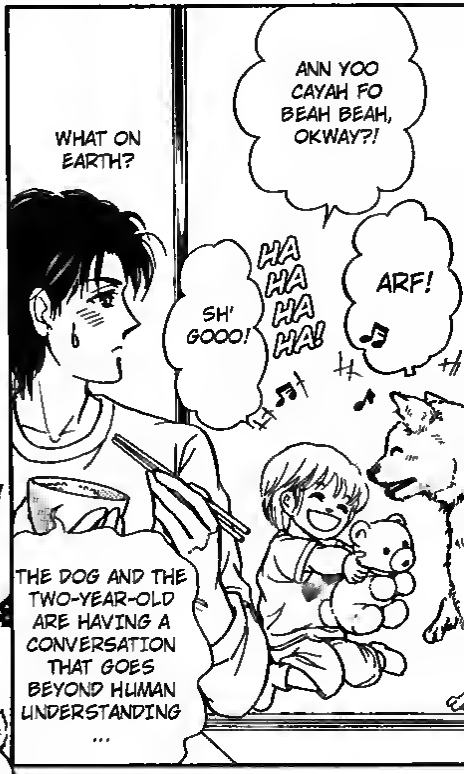
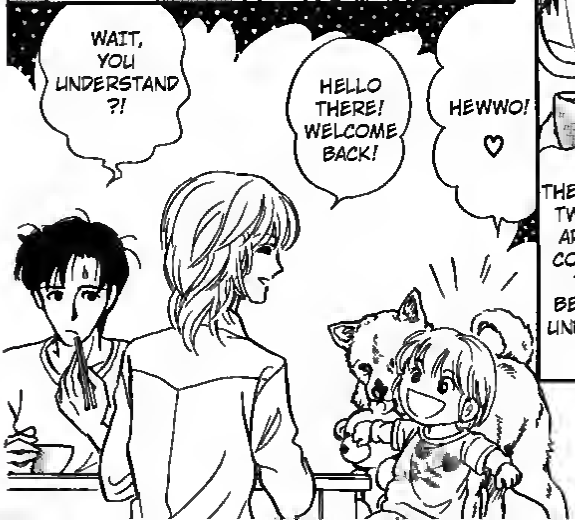
WONDER!

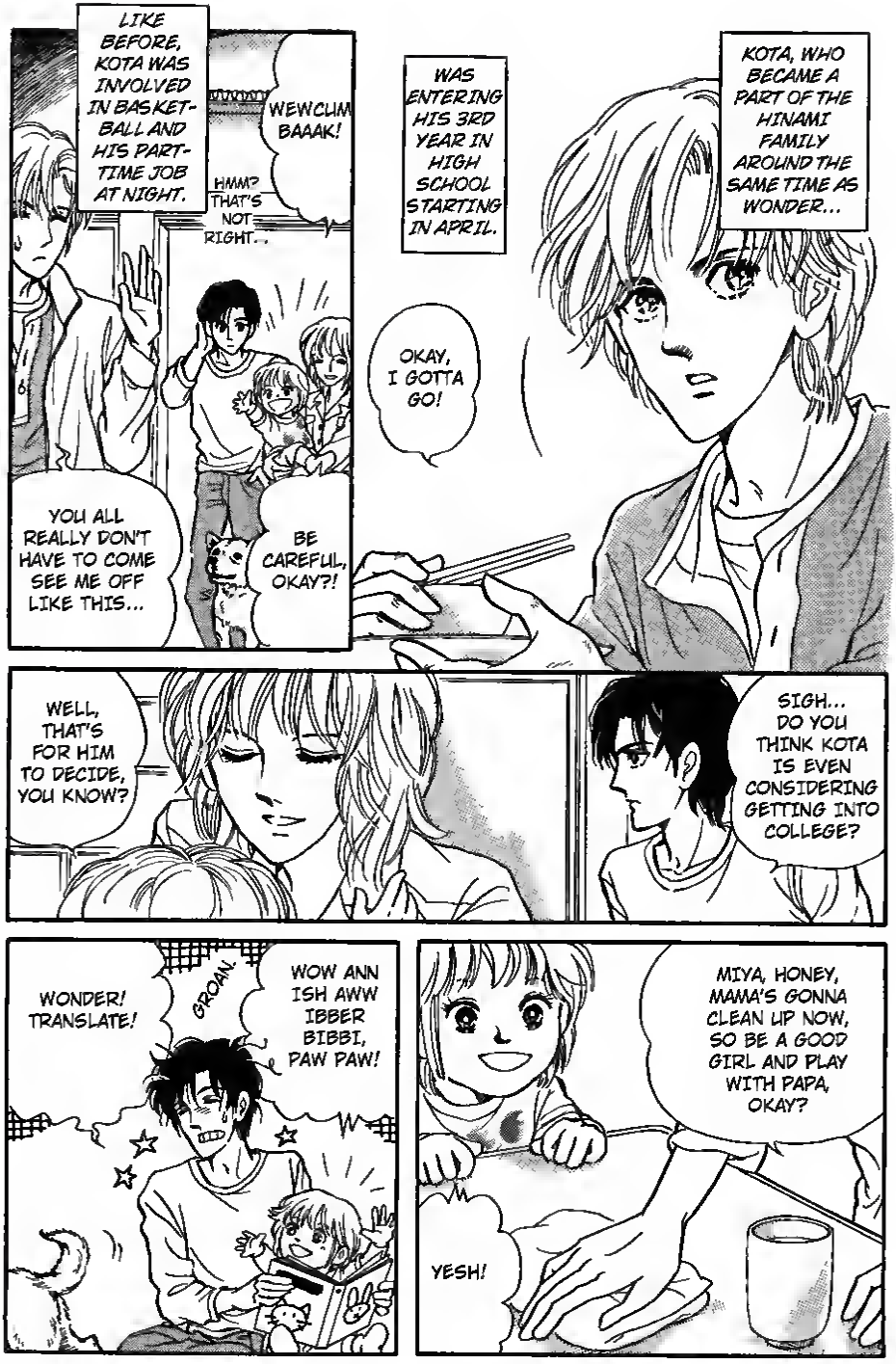
-CHAPTER 5-

ANN I GIB YOO WIVE HAPPIWY WEE!
MIYA WANNA WIVVER ZAOW A WOOVIE, YESH?


MIYA! COME AND FINISH YOUR DINNER!
WONDER! BRING MIYA OVER HERE!


ANN YOO CAYAH FO BEAH BEAH, OKWAY?!
WHAT ON EARTH?
SH' GOOO!
HA HA HA HA!
ARF!
THE DOG AND THE TWO-YEAR-OLD ARE HAVING A CONVERSATION THAT GOES BEYOND HUMAN UNDERSTANDING ...


WAIT, YOU UNDERSTAND ?!
HELLO THERE! WELCOME BACK!
HEWWO! ♡


LIKE BEFORE, KOTA WAS INVOLVED IN BASKET-BALL AND HIS PART-TIME JOB AT NIGHT.
WEWCUM BAAAK!
HMM? THAT'S NOT RIGHT...
YOU ALL REALLY DON'T HAVE TO COME SEE ME OFF LIKE THIS...
BE CAREFUL, OKAY?!
WAS ENTERING HIS 3RD YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL STARTING IN APRIL.
OKAY, I GOTTA GO!
KOTA, WHO BECAME A PART OF THE HINAMI FAMILY AROUND THE SAME TIME AS WONDER...
WELL, THAT'S FOR HIM TO DECIDE, YOU KNOW?
SIGH... DO YOU THINK KOTA IS EVEN CONSIDERING GETTING INTO COLLEGE?
WONDER! TRANSLATE!
GROAN.
WOW ANN ISH AWW IBBER BIBBI, PAW PAW!
MIYA, HONEY, MAMA'S GONNA CLEAN UP NOW, SO BE A GOOD GIRL AND PLAY WITH PAPA, OKAY?
YESH!

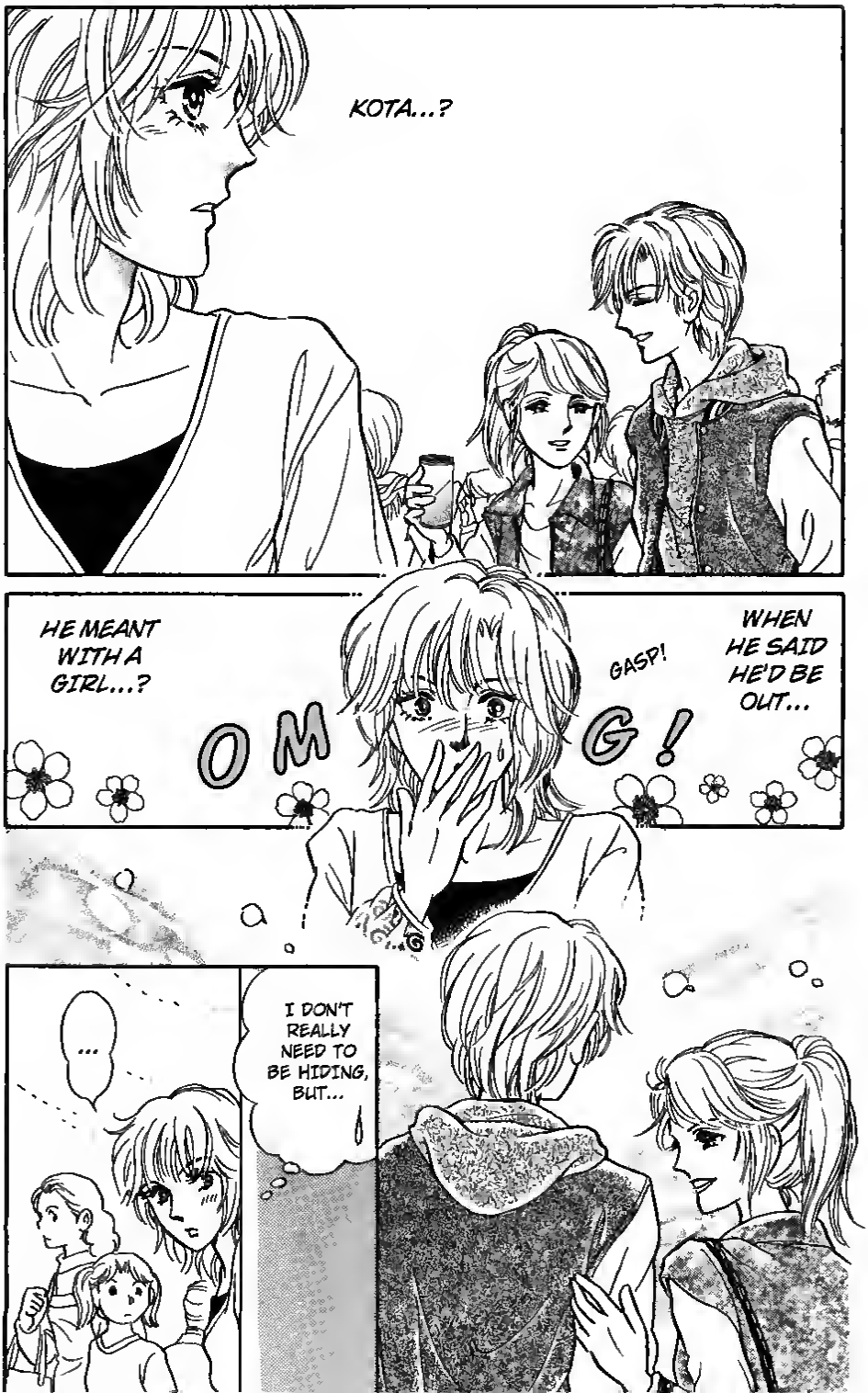
KOTA, AFTER YOU'RE FINISHED WITH THAT, YOU CAN CALL IT A NIGHT!
YES, MA'AM!
SNACK
アイ
HEY! WASN'T HE THE LITTLE BOY WHO USED TO EAT HIS DINNER IN THE CORNER OF THE SHOP?
WE OLD-TIMERS HAVE HUNG AROUND HERE FOR A VERY LONG TIME, MOMMA...
ALTHOUGH IT'S A SHAME WHAT HAPPENED TO MIYA...
IT'S ALREADY BEEN ALMOST 9 YEARS SINCE THEN!
SO I TAKE IT YOU'RE LOOKING AFTER THE BOY NOW, MOMMA?
NO! ACTUALLY, IT'S THE OTHER WAY AROUND! HE WORKS HARD HELPING ME IN THE SHOP FOR VERY LITTLE PAY!
I'LL TAKE THESE EMPTY BEER BOTTLES OUT!
AH, THAT'S SWEET OF YOU, KOTA! THANK YOU!

THAT'S RIGHT. THEY'RE A YOUNG COUPLE, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE THEY'VE BEEN TAKING VERY GOOD CARE OF HIM.
SO THEN, IS HE WITH MIYA'S YOUNGER BROTHER?
YOU CAN TELL THAT THEY RAISED HIM WELL JUST BY LOOKING AT HIM!
.....
GULP!
MIYA WAS ALWAYS A SWEET GIRL, HERSELF.
SLAM!
I CAN'T BELIEVE WHAT HAPPENED TO HER-
OH, RIGHT!
HUH?
WOBBLE
HOW MUCH...?
... NO... I'M FINE...
ARE YOU SURE YOU DON'T WANT TO STAY AND REST FOR A BIT?
WILL YOU BE ALRIGHT?
SNACK

GOOD NIGHT, KOTA!
アイ
WELL, THEN, I'M TAKING OFF!
EXCUSE ME...
ARE YOU OKAY?
IT'S THE GIRL THAT WAS IN THE SNACK BAR ...
.....

THANK YOU.
I FEEL BETTER, NOW...
YOU SHOULDN'T DRINK SO MUCH...
MY FOUNDATION GOT ON YOUR HANDKERCHIEF...
I'LL SEE IF I CAN WASH IT OFF...
NO, NO. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
HERE, I'LL GIVE YOU MY HANDKERCHIEF IN EXCHANGE.
AH!
IT'S REALLY OKAY...
HIC...
TAKE IT, I INSIST! SWAP MINE FOR YOURS!
MY NAME IS SHURI.
IF IT'S ALRIGHT WITH YOU, DO YOU WANT TO GO OUT THIS SUNDAY?
I'M ALWAYS FREE WITH NOTHING TO DO IN MY APARTMENT.

OKAY, SO MIYA'S WITH ME, THEN?
WELL, SINCE KOTA'S OUT FOR THE DAY, TOO...
I THINK IT'D BE GOOD FOR FATHER AND DAUGHTER TO HAVE SOME ALONE TIME!
BESIDES, THESE DAYS YOU'VE BEEN BUMMED OUT THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT SHE'S SAYING!
MARKET
SEE YOU AT THE PARK!
BAI BAI!


KOTA...?
HE MEANT WITH A GIRL...?
GASP!
WHEN HE SAID HE'D BE OUT...
OMG!
...
I DON'T REALLY NEED TO BE HIDING, BUT...

I WONDER IF HE MET HER AFTER THE SNACK BAR...
HMM...
HE'S NOT A CHILD ANYMORE.
KOTA HAS DATED A LOT OF DIFFERENT GIRLS, HASN'T HE?
I DON'T GET IT.
HE'S QUITE POPULAR WITH THE GIRLS AT SCHOOL, TOO...
FROM WHAT I COULD TELL...
SHE LOOKED ABOUT THREE OR FOUR YEARS OLDER THAN KOTA.
WHO ARE YOU CALLING MOTHER-IN-LAW ?!?!
ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT WHAT KIND OF GIRL YOU'LL BE MOTHER-IN-LAW TO?
A DAUGHTER WILL LEAVE HER FATHER IF HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND HER, YOU KNOW?
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ?!
SIGH...
YES?
PAW PAW WANNA WIBBER WABBER?

I MEAN, FOR GOING OUT WITH ME ON YOUR BREAK LIKE THIS...
THANKS AGAIN.
I HAVEN'T GONE OUT LIKE THIS IN SO LONG...
SINCE I CAME HERE, I'VE PRETTY MUCH ONLY BEEN AT MY WORKPLACE OR MY APARTMENT.
ALTHOUGH I USUALLY HAVE PRACTICE ON SUNDAYS WHEN A GAME'S COMING UP.
NO PROBLEM. I DIDN'T HAVE ANY PLANS.
I USED TO LIVE AROUND HERE LONG TIME AGO...
BUT...
I DON'T WANT TO SEE ANY OF THE FRIENDS I KNEW BACK THEN.
HEY...
HM?
THAT'S MY FAMILY OVER THERE!
!
HEY! WONDER!
WOOF!

THANKS FOR TODAY! I HAD FUN!
KOTAAA!
?
ARF! ARF!
HUH?
OH, I SHOULD GET GOING!
KAORI, IF YOU SAW US, WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?
IT WOULD'VE BEEN NICE TO SEE YOUR GIRLFRIEND.
WELL, I DIDN'T WANT TO INTERRUPT YOUR DATE!
SHE WAS JUST WITH ME.
KAORI TOLD ME THAT SHE SAW YOUR DATE.
WHERE IS SHE?
WOO! WOO!
WHAT? SHE JUST LEFT?
TAIYO!
WHAT IS?
THAT'S A PECULIAR ATTITUDE TO HAVE FOR A "MOTHER".
HMPH!

HEY! HINAMI! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!
HUH?
WHO WAS THAT GIRL WITH THE PONYTAIL YOU WERE WITH YESTERDAY?!
WHAT'S IT TO YOU?
HEY! DON'T GO!
TELL ME WHO THAT OLDER WOMAN WAS ?!

SAWAKI, ARE THINGS NOT GOING WELL BETWEEN YOU TWO?
WHY IS IKUMI GETTING ALL JEALOUS OVER THAT GIRL HINAMI WAS WITH?
HINAMI! TELL ME!!!
SNACK
アイ
YOU WERE WAITING THIS WHOLE TIME?
I SUSPECTED YOU'D BE FINISHED YOUR JOB AROUND NOW!

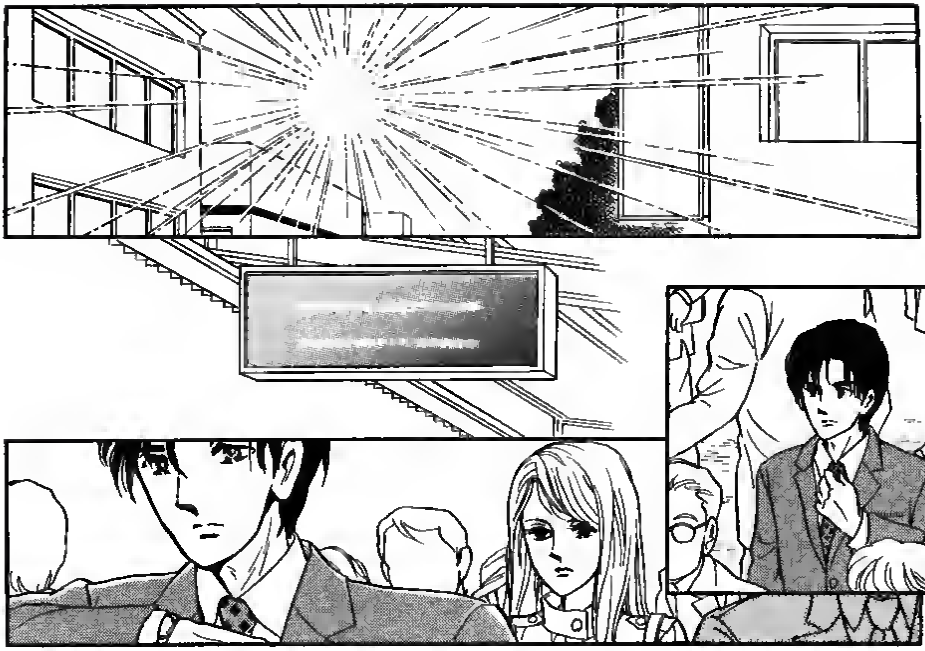
THEY'LL SAY YOU HAVE BAD TASTE.
THERE'S NOBODY LIKE THAT AROUND ME THAT I KNOW OF.
NO, NOT AT ALL.
DOES IT BOTHER YOU? HAVING AN OLDER GIRL FOLLOW YOU AROUND?
DOESN'T IT LOOK BAD IF YOU'RE CAUGHT BY YOUR CLASSMATES?
I SEE...
HMM...
BUT DON'T YOU NEED SOMEBODY WHO CAN TALK TO YOU ABOUT MORE THINGS THAN ME?
SHURI, I KNOW YOU TOLD ME THAT YOU DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS...

I'M SORRY. I'M NOT REALLY GOOD AT EXPRESSING MYSELF...
I ENDED UP HURTING A FRIEND IN MY CLASS BECAUSE OF IT...
NO, IT'S NOT THAT.
SO IT DOES BOTHER YOU! OF COURSE IT WOULD! WHAT WAS I THINKING? I'M FOUR YEARS OLDER THAN YOU!
YOUR BEST FRIENDS JUST END UP DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM YOU JUST BECAUSE OF ONE LITTLE THING.
FRIENDS ...
EVEN THE NEIGHBORHOOD LADY WHO WOULD BE SO KIND TO ME...
NOBODY WAS ABLE TO SEE THINGS FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW!
EVEN THOUGH I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!

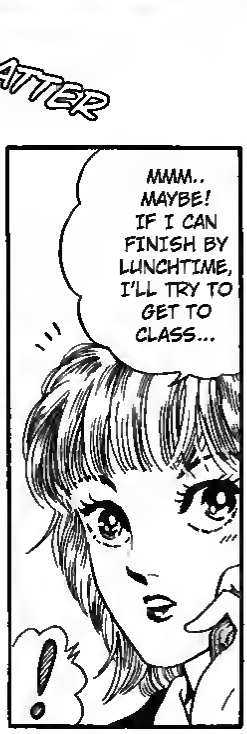
YOU'RE HAPPY RIGHT NOW.
YOU WOULDN'T UNDER-STAND...
YOU HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS... THERE'S NO REASON WHY YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND ME...
.....
IF ONE DAY... ALL THOSE THINGS YOU TAKE FOR GRANTED...
WERE TO SUDDENLY BREAK INTO A MILLION PIECES...
THEN YOU'D UNDER-STAND...

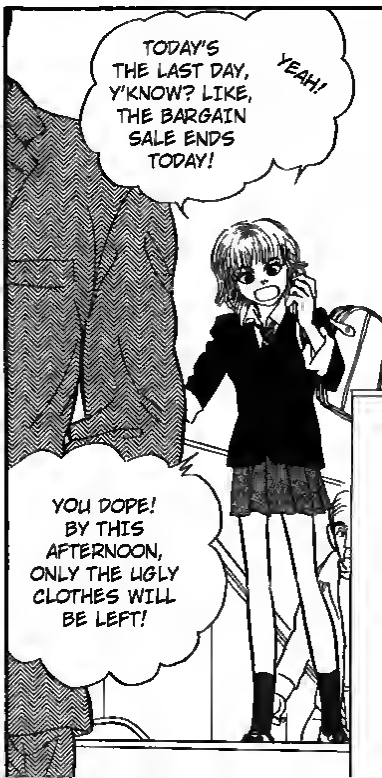
THERE IS NO REASON WHY YOU WOULD UNDERSTAND ME.
.....
WHINE...
WONDER?
SNIFF
SNIFF
SHE SAID SHE USED TO LIVE HERE LONG AGO...
MAYBE SHE EXPERIENCED A LOT OF HURTS BACK THEN...

HEY! WONDER?!
TUG
NO, WONDER! THAT'S SHURI'S!
SNIFF SNIFF
I HAD IT THIS WHOLE TIME AND FORGOT TO GIVE IT BACK!
CHOMP
HEY!
RUFF!
THIS HOUSE ...

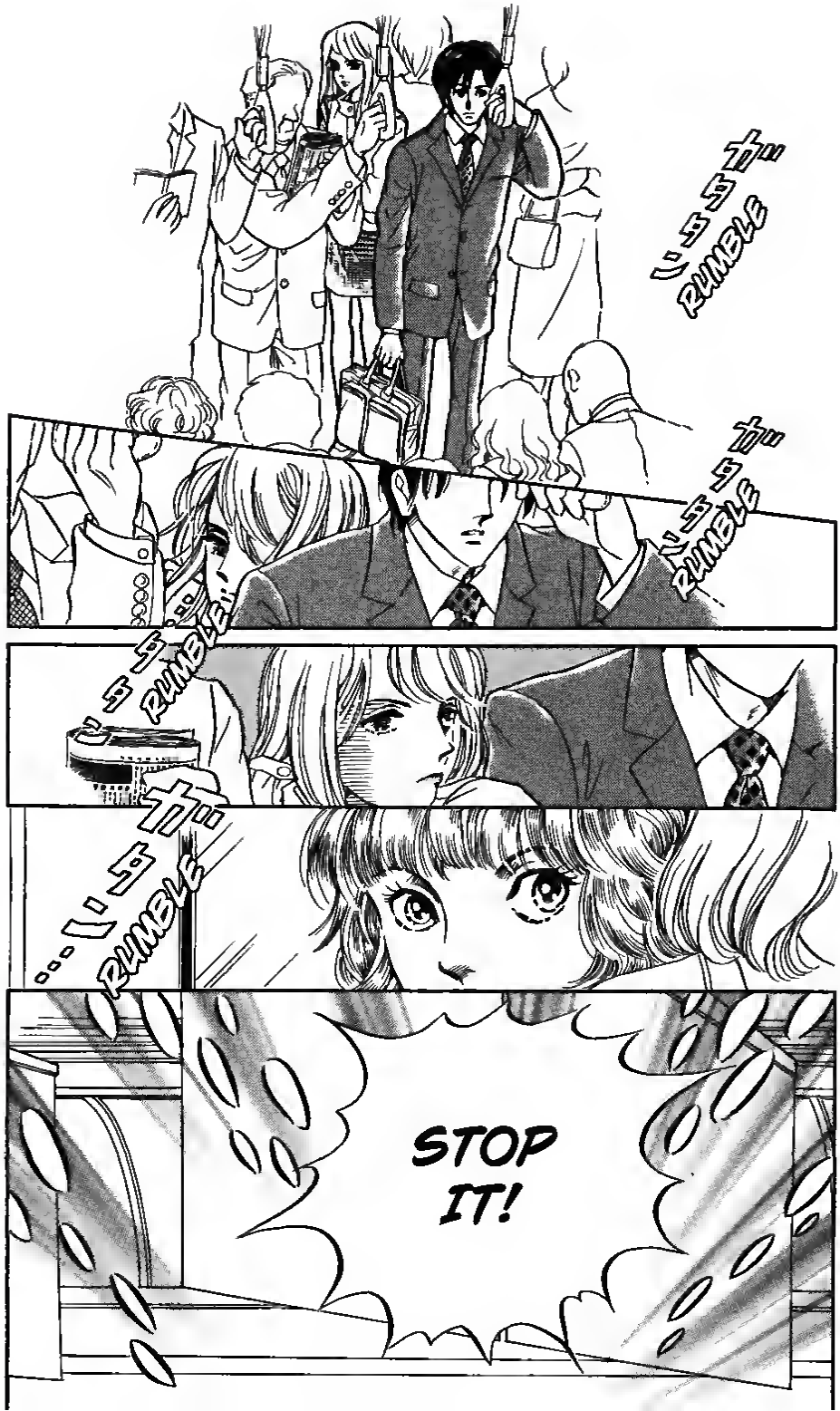


CHATTER
GAH! IT'S TAIYO!
SHOOT! THIS IS BAD...! IF HE CATCHES ME SKIPPING CLASS, I'M IN BIG TROUBLE!

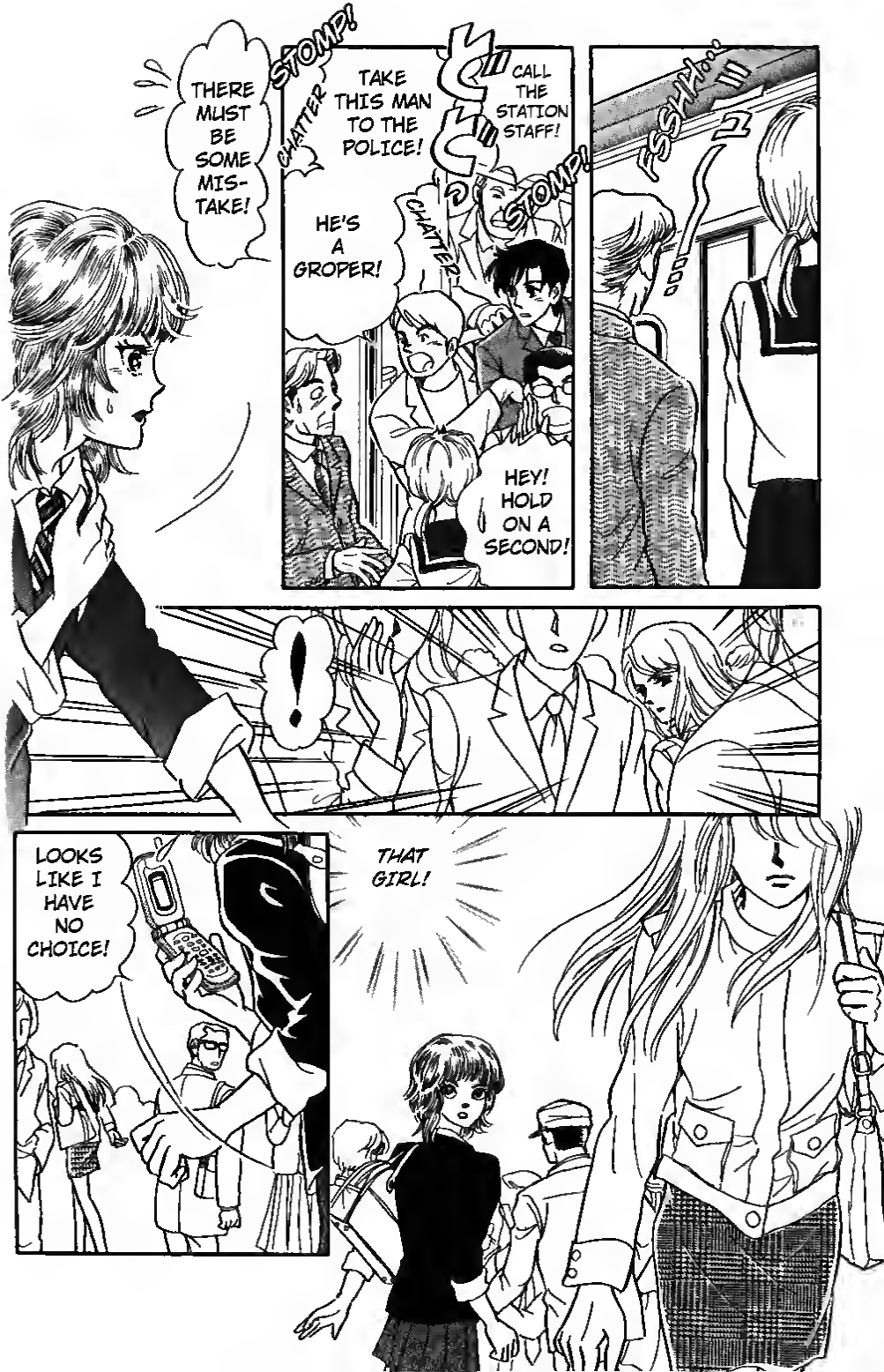

CHATTER
MMM.. MAYBE! IF I CAN FINISH BY LUNCHTIME, I'LL TRY TO GET TO CLASS...
!

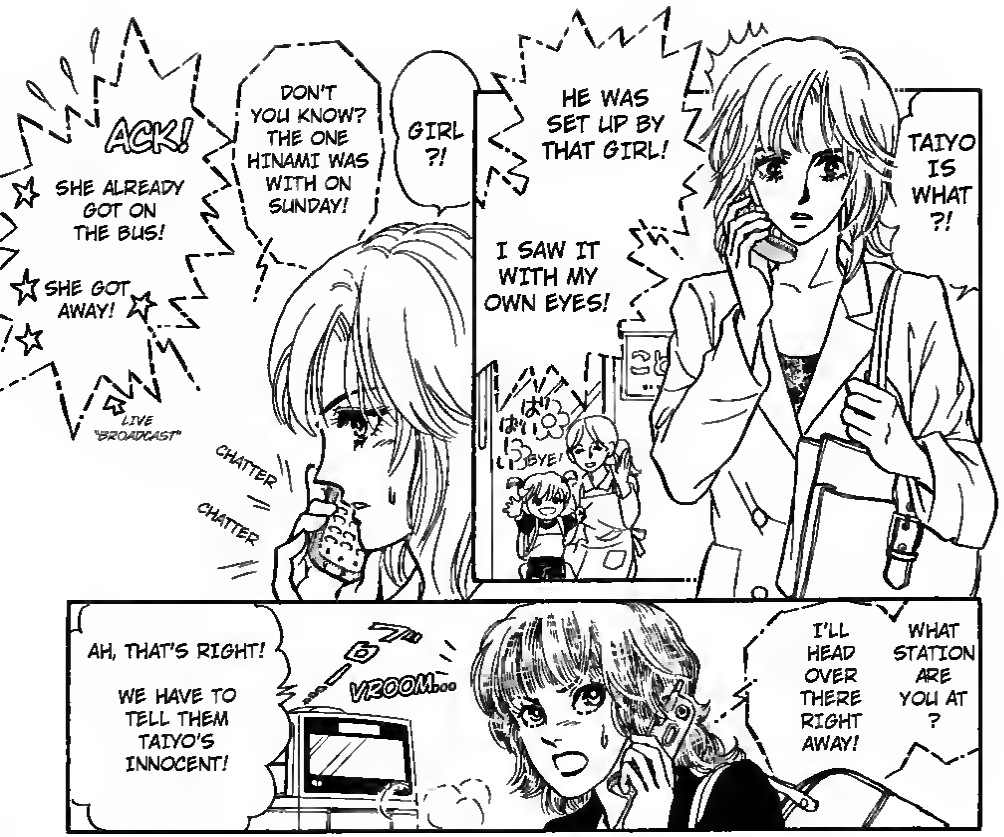

TODAY'S THE LAST DAY, Y'KNOW? LIKE, THE BARGAIN SALE ENDS TODAY!
YEAH!
YOU DOPE! BY THIS AFTERNOON, ONLY THE UGLY CLOTHES WILL BE LEFT!

AAAAHhhh...
HUH?!
IT'S THAT GIRL WHO WAS ALL OVER HINAMI... WHAT'S SHE DOING BESIDE TAIYO?!
GASP!
IS SHE TRYING TO MAKE A PASS AT *HIM*, TOO?! THAT HAG!
GRR!

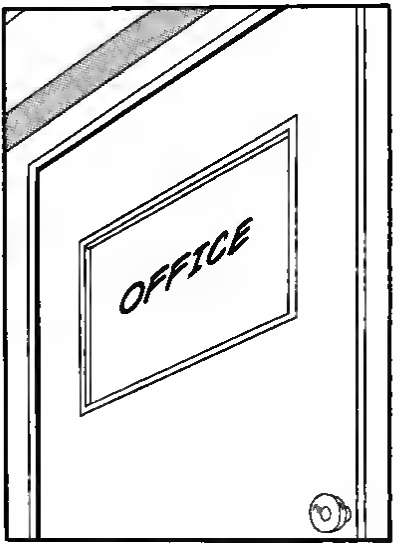

RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
STOP IT!

MURMUR
MURMUR
HUH ...?
GRAB
THIS MAN WAS GROPING ME!
THIS ...
THIS MAN...
W-WHAAAT?!


THERE MUST BE SOME MIS-TAKE!
STOMP!
CHATTER
TAKE THIS MAN TO THE POLICE!
HE'S A GROPER!
CALL THE STATION STAFF!
STOMP!
CHATTER
HEY! HOLD ON A SECOND!
FSHHH...
!
LOOKS LIKE I HAVE NO CHOICE!
THAT GIRL!

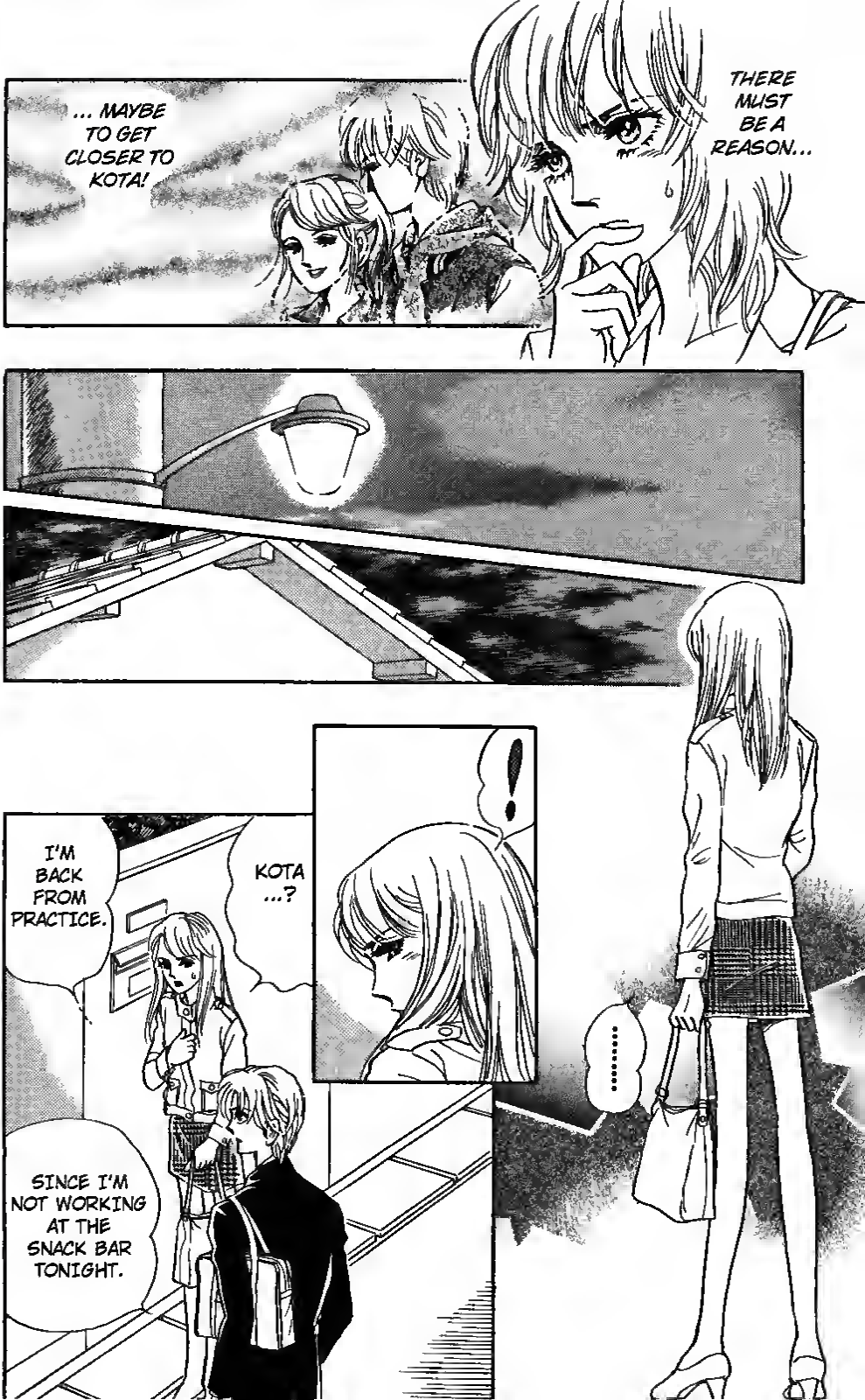

ACK!
SHE ALREADY GOT ON THE BUS!
SHE GOT AWAY!
LIVE "BROADCAST"
DON'T YOU KNOW? THE ONE HINAMI WAS WITH ON SUNDAY!
GIRL ?!
CHATTER
CHATTER
HE WAS SET UP BY THAT GIRL!
I SAW IT WITH MY OWN EYES!
BYE!
TAIYO IS WHAT ?!
AH, THAT'S RIGHT!
WE HAVE TO TELL THEM TAIYO'S INNOCENT!
VROOM...
I'LL HEAD OVER THERE RIGHT AWAY!
WHAT STATION ARE YOU AT ?

THAT GIRL ALREADY RAN OFF!
I TOLD YOU ALL OF THIS ALREADY!
I TOLD YOU! I'M NOT THE PERSON WHO SAID SHE GOT GROPED!


OFFICE

WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THIS?
KAORI!
YOU'RE TELLING ME!
WHAT EXACTLY AM I SUPPOSED TO REFLECT ON?
WELL, SINCE THE WOMAN IN QUESTION DISAPPEARED BEFORE SHE COULD FILE A COMPLAINT...
I SUPPOSE IT'S OKAY FOR YOU TO LEAVE FOR NOW.
WHY WOULD TAIYO, WHO'S LEFT HANDED, GO OUT OF HIS WAY TO GROPE SOME GIRL ON HIS RIGHT SIDE IN THE FIRST PLACE?!
AND WHILE HOLDING A BAG, MIGHT I ADD!
YOU SHOULD BECOME A DETECTIVE, IKUMI!
SIGH.
TAKE SOME TIME TO REFLECT AND MAKE SURE THAT THIS KIND OF THING DOESN'T HAPPEN NEXT TIME!

IF IT WASN'T FOR HER TESTIMONY, YOU'D HAVE MUCH BIGGER PROBLEMS THAN JUST BEING LATE FOR WORK.
WELL, I'M DEFINITELY NOT GONNA MAKE IT ON TIME FOR WORK!
IT REALLY ISN'T A JOKE, TAIYO!
THAT'S FOR SURE! THANKS AGAIN!
THANK GOODNESS THE TWO OF YOU WERE ON THE SAME TRAIN!
HEHE!
NOT AT ALL! I'LL BE ON MY WAY TO SCHOOL, THEN!
BUT I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING...
UM...
WELL, I KNOW THAT MUCH!
PEOPLE COULD END UP TREATING MIYA AND KOTA THE SAME WAY.
IF ONE MEMBER OF THE FAMILY GETS DISGRACED LIKE THAT...
EVEN IF EVERYONE ELSE THOUGHT YOU WERE A LIAR... I WOULD STILL BELIEVE YOU!
STILL...
WHY WOULD SOMEONE WHO KNOWS KOTA DO THIS TO TAIYO...?
TOUCHED


... MAYBE TO GET CLOSER TO KOTA!
THERE MUST BE A REASON...
!
KOTA ...?
I'M BACK FROM PRACTICE.
SINCE I'M NOT WORKING AT THE SNACK BAR TONIGHT.
.....

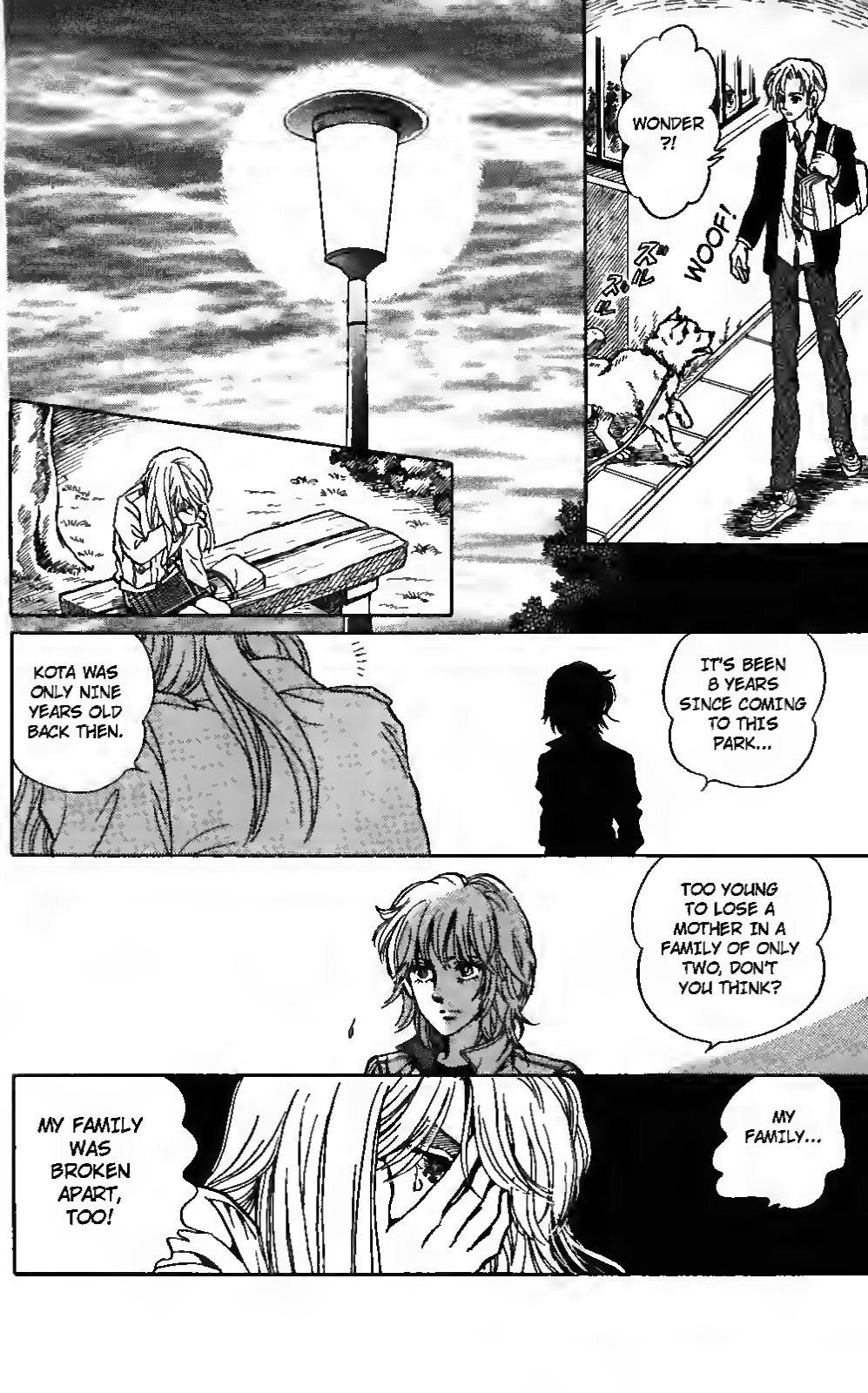
I THINK WONDER WANTS TO GO FOR HIS WALK.
TAIYO, CAN YOU PLAY WITH MIYA?
ARF!
ワン
ワン
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
ワン
ワン
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!

SINCE I STARTED LIVING WHERE I LIVE NOW...
HE'S UNDER-STOOD HOW I FEEL...
AND HE'S SAVED ME WHEN I WAS IN DANGER...
AS I WAS THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOU HAD TOLD ME THE OTHER DAY...
...
WONDER BROUGHT ME HERE...
IT LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE ELSE IS LIVING IN THIS HOUSE NOW...
BUT...
WONDER HAD FOUND THIS PLACE WHEN I WAS A CHILD...
IN THOSE DAYS, I CAME HERE SECRETLY WITH WONDER TO LOOK AT THE HOUSE.

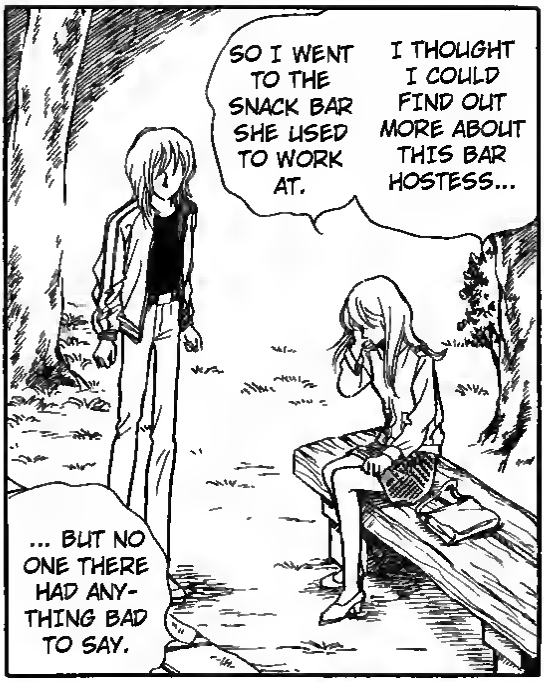
AND I KNEW THERE WAS NOTHING A LITTLE KID LIKE ME COULD DO...
THERE WASN'T A POINT IN GOING THERE...
.....
THIS NEIGHBOR-HOOD IS WHERE THAT HOUSE IS... THE HOUSE OF THE MAN WHO KILLED KOTA'S MOTHER!
THIS NEIGH-BOR-HOOD...
CHOMP!
HUH?!
I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT!
THIS IS NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU TO START TALKING ABOUT THE PAST!
WHAT IS IT, WONDER?!

TAIYO ISN'T SOMEONE WHO WOULD DO THAT.
A FRIEND WHO WAS ON THE SAME TRAIN SAW THE WHOLE THING.
I KNOW THAT, WHATEVER HAPPENS, I CAN TAKE CARE OF MIYA AND KAORI.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR?! YOUR UNCLE WAS ARRESTED AT THE STATION THIS MORNING!
YOUR SCHOOL AND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD ARE GOING TO SEE YOU AS THE GUY WITH THE PERVERTED FAMILY!
I'M DIFFERENT FROM BACK THEN...
BACK THEN, ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS CATCHING THE MAN WHO TOOK MY MOTHER'S LIFE AND GOT AWAY WITH IT.
NOTHING ELSE WAS ON MY MIND...
BUT...
.....

KAORI AND WONDER HELPED ME, AND THINGS TURNED OUT ALRIGHT...
BUT IT DOESN'T MEAN IT ENDS THERE, RIGHT?
ESPECIALLY SINCE THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE UNRELATED TO ME, WHO WAS CAUGHT UP IN THE SAME MESS AS I WAS...
WHO ALSO HAD TO SUFFER, UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING ...
ARGH! I DON'T KNOW!
WHY ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THIS!!


WONDER ?!
WOOF!
IT'S BEEN 8 YEARS SINCE COMING TO THIS PARK...
KOTA WAS ONLY NINE YEARS OLD BACK THEN.
MY FAMILY...
TOO YOUNG TO LOSE A MOTHER IN A FAMILY OF ONLY TWO, DON'T YOU THINK?
MY FAMILY WAS BROKEN APART, TOO!

WHEN I WAS IN MY FIRST YEAR OF JUNIOR HIGH...
EVERYONE AT SCHOOL KNEW...
AT THE HOUSE, ON THE PHONE, AND EVEN IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD... WE WERE HATED BY EVERYONE!
HE SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER, BUT HE WAS SMITTEN BY A HOSTESS, AND EVEN ENDED UP STALKING HER...
AFTER THAT, HE KILLED HER AND FLED!
WITH A FATHER LIKE THAT, I GUESS IT WAS ONLY EXPECTED!
I EVEN GAVE UP MY STUDIES IN COLLEGE BECAUSE WE DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO CONTINUE.
EVEN WHEN MY MOTHER AND I MOVED TO HER HOMETOWN, EVERYONE AROUND US WERE SO COLD.
THEY ALL KNEW THAT IT WAS MY FATHER WHO WAS THE ROTTEN ONE!
SO, EVEN MY FUTURE WAS DESTROYED!
SO WHY IS IT THAT WE HAD TO BE THE ONLY ONES TO SUFFER SUCH AWFUL TREATMENT!
WHY ONLY US?!


I THOUGHT I COULD FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS BAR HOSTESS...
SO I WENT TO THE SNACK BAR SHE USED TO WORK AT.
... BUT NO ONE THERE HAD ANY-THING BAD TO SAY.

BUT THAT ISN'T KOTA'S FAULT, NOW, IS IT?
WELL, I'M NOT A BAD PERSON, EITHER!

KOTA...
HE HAD NO IDEA WHAT KIND OF PAST I HAD...
SO WHEN I INVITED HIM, HE SIMPLY CAME ALONG...

AND SO... WHILE I WAS LISTENING TO THE PATRONS AT THE BAR, I GOT IRRITATED AND DRANK TOO MUCH...
AND THAT'S WHEN HE TOOK CARE OF ME.

WHY WOULD YOU CARE ABOUT THE FAMILY OF THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR MOTHER?!!
WHAT A FOOL !!!
BOTH YOU AND KOTA WERE JUST HELPLESS CHILDREN, YOU KNOW...

I WOULD'VE DONE THE SAME THING YOUR MOTHER DID...
IF I WAS IN THAT POSITION ...
YOUR MOTHER MUST HAVE HAD IT ROUGH, TOO...
HAVING TO DO HER BEST TO LIVE AND TAKE CARE OF YOU...
I THINK SHE FOUGHT HER HARDEST TO PROTECT YOU...
SO THAT SHE COULD MAKE A PLACE FOR YOUR FUTURE...

I'M GOING HOME.
FOR SOME REASON, I WANT TO BE BESIDE MY MOTHER, NOW.
THEN... I HOPE TO FIND A PLACE TO WORK AND LIVE IN MY HOMETOWN.
ALTHOUGH YOU AND I ORIGINALLY COME FROM DIFFERENT PLACES...
I WAS WRONG TO RESENT YOU FOR THE ENVIRONMENT YOU GREW UP IN...
IF MY MOTHER EVER FOUND OUT THAT I WAS THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS, SHE'D BE PRETTY SHOCKED.

KIND OF LIKE HOW BOTH YOU AND KAORI LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER AND YOUR FAMILY.
SO FROM NOW ON, I'M GOING TO HELP MY MOTHER ...
MY MOTHER DID HER BEST LIVING IN A SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE WERE COLD TO HER...
I'M SORRY ... I DID YOU WRONG.
.....
SHURI... YOUR LIFE...
BEGINS NOW...!
cats

SLAP!
YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, TOO, OKAY?!
RIGHT!
HM?
DIS IZ KOTA'S HANKACHIFF, INNIT, MIYA?
IZ VEWWY VEWWY KYUUTE, YESH?!
YESH! YESH!
WELL, WELL... LOOKS LIKE THE FATHER-DAUGHTER BOND HAS BEEN SAVED FROM EXTINCTION!

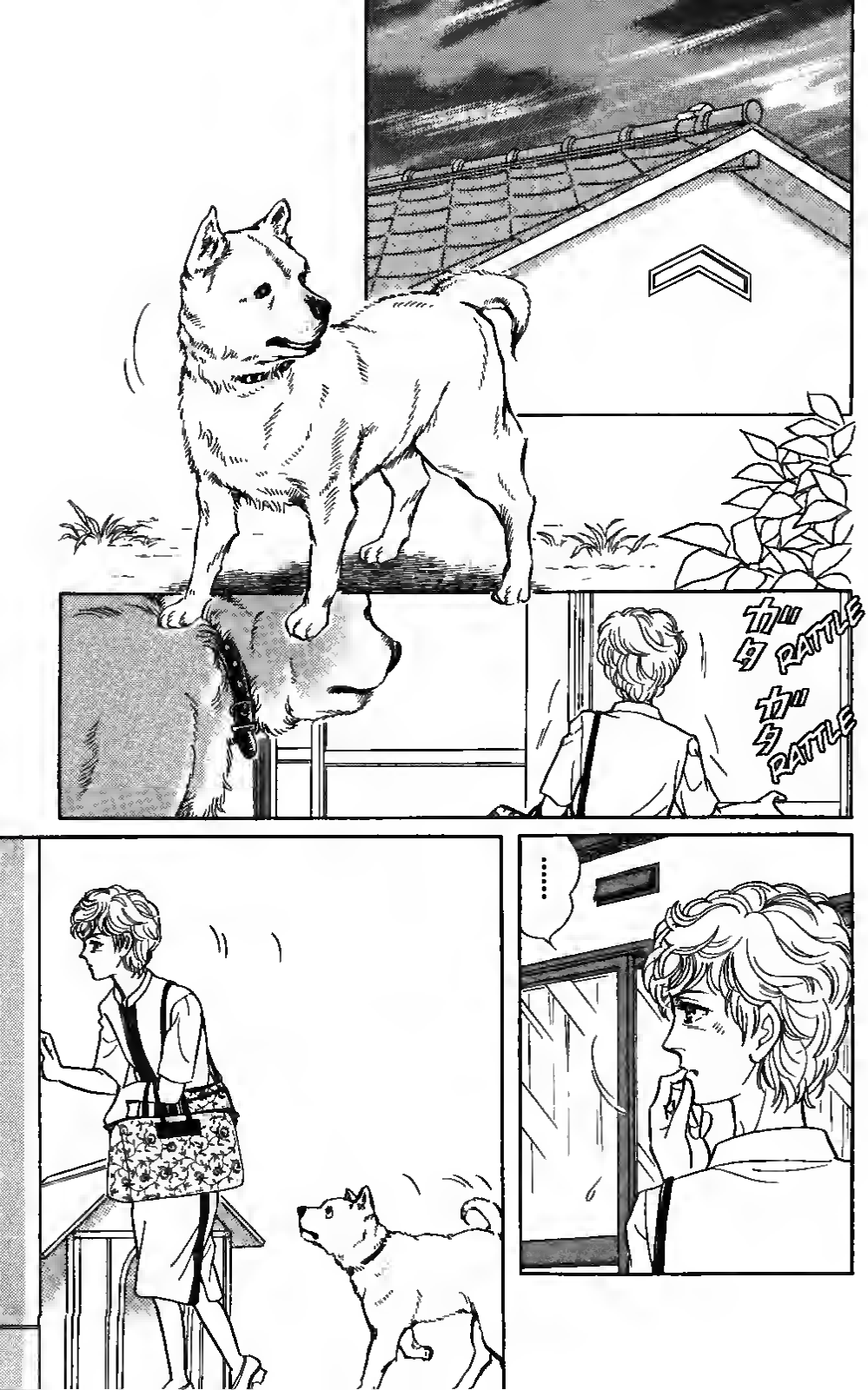
END OF CHAPTER 5

WONDER!

WONDER!

-CHAPTER 6-

WAAAH!
WAAAH!


ガタ RATTLE
ガタ RATTLE
……

WOOF!
YIPE!
BEEP!
HEY, WONDER!
DID YOU UNCHAIN YOURSELF AGAIN?
WOOF!
WOOF!
.....
WHAT BRINGS YOU TO OUR HOUSE?
"YOUR" HOUSE ...?
WHO ARE YOU?
HM?

GRIMACE
I THOUGHT YOU WOULD HAVE MOVED OUT OF THIS RUNDOWN RENTAL HOUSE BY NOW...
SIGHooo
NERVOUS
NERVOUS
THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR COMING ALL THE WAY HERE TO VISIT ?!
WHAT'S WITH THE POLITY FACE?
KAORI'S MOTHER?
I THINK SO.
YOUR WEDDING? SO TEN YEARS AGO?
.....
I WONDER IF IT'S OKAY TO JUST GIVE HER MIYA'S SNACK...
I ONLY SAW HER AT OUR WEDDING CEREMONY, SO MY MEMORY MIGHT BE A LITTLE HAZY, THOUGH...

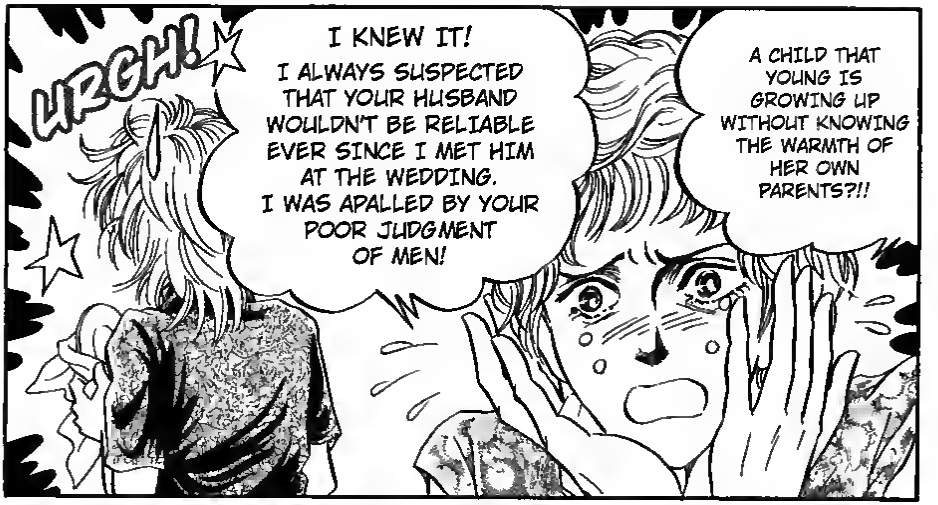
I JUST CAME TO SEE YOUR FACES.
BUT I FEEL LIKE I'M NOT EVEN WELCOME HERE...
BESIDES, IS THERE EVEN ROOM TO SLEEP IN SUCH A SMALL HOUSE?
OH, THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM. I CAN JUST STAY IN KOTA'S PREFAB.
TAIYO! YOU DON'T HAVE TO BRING OUT TEA AND SNACKS!
AH ...
ARE YOU ABLE TO STAY THE NIGHT, MOTHER?
.....
HEA YOO AW!
ISSA WIBWAW DWAWING!
SMILE
SMILE
TAIYO! THAT'S NOT UP TO YOU TO DECIDE!
T'NITE YOU SWEEP WIFF GWANNY, YESH?
ALTHOUGH I COULD ONLY MAKE OUT "HERE YOU ARE".
ISN'T SHE A FRIENDLY LITTLE ONE!
FWEND-WEE!

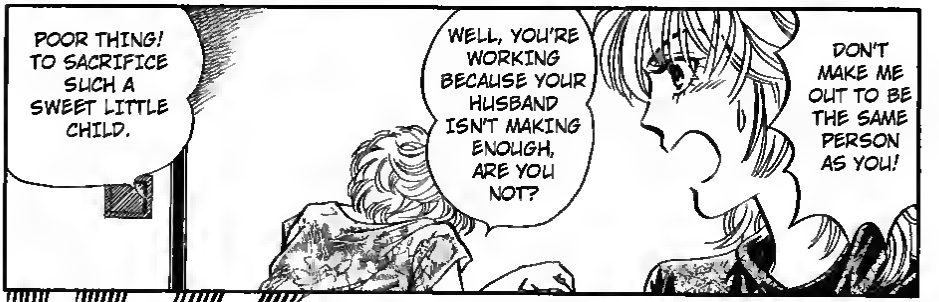
I COULD EAT AT THE SNACK BAR.
OH? YOU HAVE A PART-TIME JOB?
WHAT? YOU'RE NOT STAYING FOR DINNER?
I'M GOING TO HEAD FOR WORK, IF THAT'S ALRIGHT...
THE MEAT JUST HAS TO BE COOKED NOW...
YOU KNOW YOU DON'T HAVE TO MIND YOURSELF AROUND SOMEONE WHO BARGED IN HERE UNINVITED!!
KOTA IS A VALUED MEMBER OF THIS FAMILY!!
HEH...
HE'S SO YOUNG... I WONDER IF HE GETS HIS DULLNESS FROM HIS UNCLE...
...
ARF!
...GOOD NIGHT, THEN.
SINCE THEY'RE TAKING YOU IN, GETTING YOU THROUGH SCHOOL, AND GIVING YOU A PLACE TO STUDY...
WELL... THAT'S GOOD OF YOU.
YOU SHOULD BE VERY THANKFUL YOUNG MAN. IN ANY OTHER CASE, YOU'D BE TREATED LIKE A TROUBLE-MAKER AND YOU STILL WOULDN'T HAVE THE RIGHT TO COMPLAIN

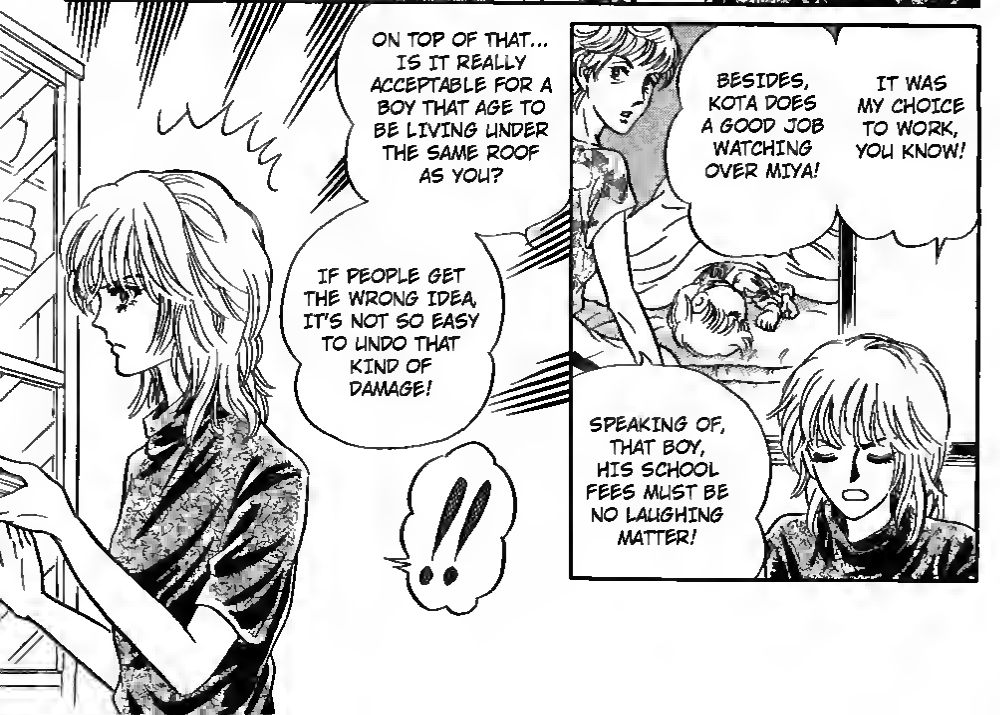
SORRY.
HM?
UMPH!
WOOF!
WOOF!
WOOF!
WONDER, GET OUT OF THE WAY!
SHE'S THE SAME SPITEFUL, SELFISH WOMAN SHE WAS LONG TIME AGO.
SHE HASN'T CHANGED ONE BIT!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY OF HER INSIPID BABBLE!
I'M SURE THE TWO OF YOU HAVE A LOT TO TALK ABOUT, NO?
NOW WHICH WAY SHOULD I SLEEP?
DON'T SAY THAT. YOU HAVEN'T SEEN HER IN SO LONG.

DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT YOU DIDN'T TALK TO YOUR OLDER SISTER FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS?
KOTA'S MOTHER ...?
I THINK SHE PLANNED ON RAISING KOTA ALL BY HERSELF, WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM THE FAMILY.
WOOF!
YOU CAN NEVER KNOW WHEN A PERSON'S LIFE WILL END...
SHOULDN'T YOU VALUE THE MEETINGS YOU DO HAVE WHILE THEY'RE STILL ALIVE AND WELL?
GOOD NIGHT, WONDER!
... OKAY! I GET IT!
I'LL BE PATIENT THIS ONE NIGHT!
I'M TELLING YOU!
ARF!
THOSE WHO ARE LEFT SAYING GOODBYE FEEL MORE REGRET THAN YOU'D EXPECT.
AND YET THE NEXT TIME I SAW HER WAS AT HER OWN FUNERAL...
SHE LIVED SO CLOSE TO US...
.....

SHE BROUGHT ME A PICTURE BOOK TO READ TO HER.
IS MIYA ASLEEP?
WE WERE BOTH LYING DOWN AS I WAS READING, AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, SHE WAS FAST ASLEEP.
SHUT..
WELL, WE'VE SINCE CHANGED TO A NURSERY SCHOOL NEARBY...
HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN WORKING AND LEAVING YOUR BABY THERE?
WHAT?! THE POOR THING!
SHE'S NOT SHY WITH STRANGERS.
EVEN THOUGH SHE'S NEVER MET ME, SHE KNOWS WHO HER RELATIVES ARE!
WE PUT HER IN A DAY-CARE CENTER BEFORE, AND SHE HAD NO PROBLEMS AT ALL THERE, EITHER.


URGH!
I KNEW IT!
I ALWAYS SUSPECTED THAT YOUR HUSBAND WOULDN'T BE RELIABLE EVER SINCE I MET HIM AT THE WEDDING. I WAS APALLED BY YOUR POOR JUDGMENT OF MEN!
A CHILD THAT YOUNG IS GROWING UP WITHOUT KNOWING THE WARMTH OF HER OWN PARENTS?!!

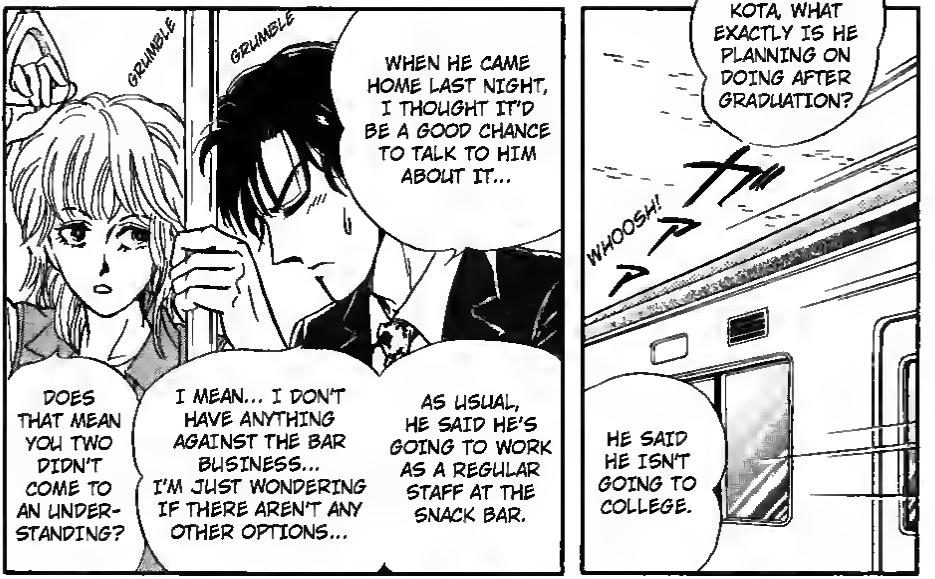

POOR THING! TO SACRIFICE SUCH A SWEET LITTLE CHILD.
WELL, YOU'RE WORKING BECAUSE YOUR HUSBAND ISN'T MAKING ENOUGH, ARE YOU NOT?
DON'T MAKE ME OUT TO BE THE SAME PERSON AS YOU!

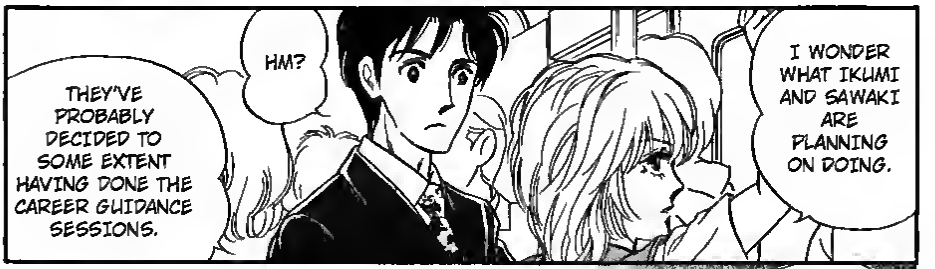

ON TOP OF THAT... IS IT REALLY ACCEPTABLE FOR A BOY THAT AGE TO BE LIVING UNDER THE SAME ROOF AS YOU?
IF PEOPLE GET THE WRONG IDEA, IT'S NOT SO EASY TO UNDO THAT KIND OF DAMAGE!
!!
BESIDES, KOTA DOES A GOOD JOB WATCHING OVER MIYA!
IT WAS MY CHOICE TO WORK, YOU KNOW!
SPEAKING OF, THAT BOY, HIS SCHOOL FEES MUST BE NO LAUGHING MATTER!

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?!
……!!
I'M NOT LIKE A CERTAIN SOMEONE WHO BREAKS UP A FAMILY FOR HER OWN DESIRES, AND THEN GOES OFF TO ENJOY HER OWN LIFE.
UH... WELL, I'M EXHAUSTED FROM THE TRIP, SO I THINK I'LL GET READY FOR BED.
……
SO IF YOU CONTINUE TO BADMOUTH THIS FAMILY, I WILL KICK YOU OUT EVEN IF TAIYO TRIES TO STOP ME!
LET ME SAY ONE THING.

I WONDER WHY SHE'S TAKING THAT TONE WITH HER MOTHER?
SHE IS NOT A MOTHER!
BAI! BAI!
SINCE SHE BARGED INTO OUR PLACE THIS TIME, I BET SHE GOT DIVORCED AGAIN AND HAS NOWHERE ELSE TO GO!
SINCE WAY BACK, SHE'S BEEN THE WORST KIND OF HUMAN!
THIS MORNING, SHE WAS BEING CRITICAL AGAIN!
IF I WASN'T RELATED TO HER, I WOULD'VE CUT CONTACT WITH HER LONG AGO!
SHE DIVORCED YOUR FATHER ?!
MY REAL FATHER DIED OF AN ILLNESS WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD.
I DIDN'T TELL YOU?
WHAAAT?!

I'M HER DAUGHTER AND EVEN I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY TIMES THAT WOMAN HAS GOTTEN DIVORCED.
SINCE THEN, EVERY TIME THERE'S A NEW GUY, SHE REGISTERS THE MARRIAGE AND THEN SPLITS UP...
SO THAT'S WHY YOUR FAMILY NAME HAD CHANGED SO MANY TIMES WHEN WE SUBMITTED OUR MARRIAGE REGISTRATION...
I DIDN'T GET THE CHANCE TO APOLOGIZE TO HIM SINCE HE CAME HOME LATE FROM WORK LAST NIGHT AND LEFT EARLY FOR BASKETBALL PRACTICE THIS MORNING.
KOTA WASN'T BOTHERED, WAS HE?
UHH?
YOU MEAN THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE THAT'S AS WARPED AS SHE IS?!
WHO IS IT ?!
A PATRON AT THE SNACK BAR MAYBE? HE SAID HE DOESN'T EVEN REMEMBER HIMSELF.
WELL, I'M SURE HE UNDERSTANDS HOW YOU AND I FEEL ABOUT ALL OF THIS...
AH... HE DID MENTION THAT YOUR MOTHER WAS SIMILAR TO SOMEONE ELSE HE KNEW.


GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE
WHEN HE CAME HOME LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT IT'D BE A GOOD CHANCE TO TALK TO HIM ABOUT IT...
DOES THAT MEAN YOU TWO DIDN'T COME TO AN UNDER-STANDING?
I MEAN... I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING AGAINST THE BAR BUSINESS... I'M JUST WONDERING IF THERE AREN'T ANY OTHER OPTIONS...
AS USUAL, HE SAID HE'S GOING TO WORK AS A REGULAR STAFF AT THE SNACK BAR.
SPEAKING OF KOTA, WHAT EXACTLY IS HE PLANNING ON DOING AFTER GRADUATION?
WHOOSH!
HE SAID HE ISN'T GOING TO COLLEGE.

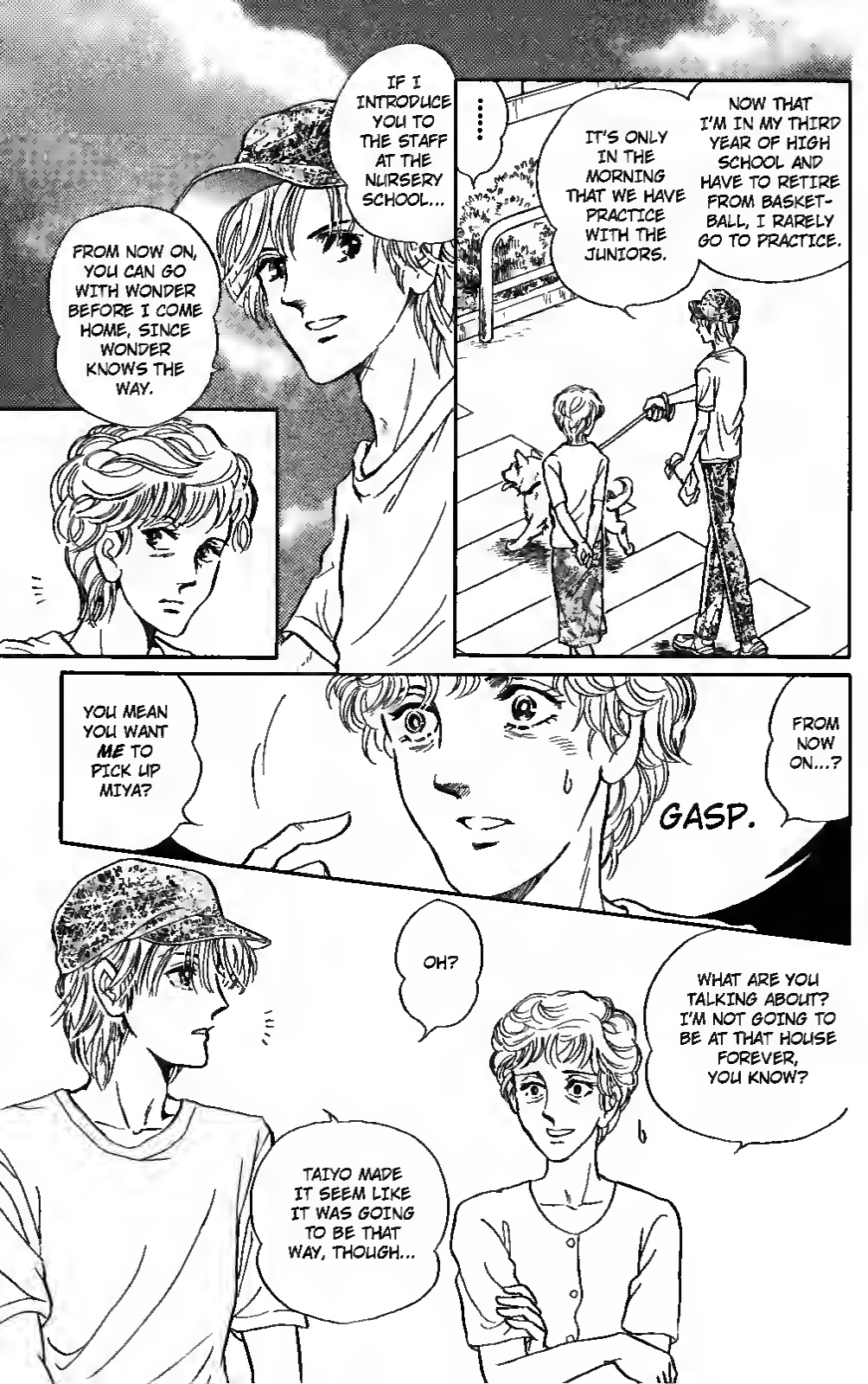

HM?
THEY'VE PROBABLY DECIDED TO SOME EXTENT HAVING DONE THE CAREER GUIDANCE SESSIONS.
I WONDER WHAT IKUMI AND SAWAKI ARE PLANNING ON DOING.

SO I NEED TO GET THE DRIVER'S LICENSE FOR LARGE VEHICLES TO START MY WORK!
LIFE
I DON'T THINK IT'S A PROBLEM THAT WE SHOULD BE WORRYING ABOUT.
IN ANY CASE, WHATEVER DECISION HE MAKES, IT'S HIS FUTURE, SO...
EVEN SO...

AHAHA HAHAHA!
IS THAT SAFE?
I SOMETIMES EVEN GET TO PARK THE CARS INTO THE GARAGE NOW.
I'M GONNA TEAR DOWN THE EXPRESSWAY IN A FLASHY, DECKED-OUT TRUCK!
HEH HEH
ARE YOU FER REAL?! GO FOR IT! YOU'RE CRAZY!
WITH "IKUMI'S MY EVERYTHING" WRITTEN ON THE BACKSIDE.
SO YOU'RE GONNA INHERIT THE FAMILY BUSINESS?
WOW. SAWAKI, YOUR FAMILY RUNS A SHIPPING AGENCY?
THAT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN. I'M THE SECOND SON.
BECOME A HAIRDRESSER OR DO SOMETHING DESIGN-RELATED!
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL?
I SEE...
YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN...
BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT OR DOING A DESK JOB IS DEFINITELY NOT MY TYPE OF THING!
I WOULDN'T MIND BECOMING MRS. HINAMI!
IKUMI, DO YOU THINK YOU'LL BECOME "MRS." SAWAKI?
HEY YOU!
SERIOUSLY?!
I THINK VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IS FOR ME.
BUT STILL, I'D LIKE TO GET A JOB, SO...

WHAT? I'M NOT DOING ANY-THING!
PANT! PANT!
WOOF!
I JUST CAME OUT FOR A BIT SINCE STAYING INSIDE THE HOUSE WAS SO BORING.
AT THAT AGE, IT'S BEST TO TAKE CARE OF A CHILD IN THE HOME!
SIGH...
THEY COULD'VE LEFT MIYA AT HOME WHILE I'M AROUND.
I MEAN, I WOULD HAVE NEVER LEFT THE HOUSE FOR WORK HAD KAORI'S FATHER NOT BEEN SICK WITH THAT LINGERING ILLNESS.
I DIDN'T HAVE TO ENTRUST HER TO OTHER PEOPLE DURING THAT TIME, DID I?

THAT'S WHY SHE GREW UP TO BE SUCH A COMPLICATED CHILD.
SHE'D WARMED UP A LITTLE TO HER SECOND FATHER...
BUT AFTER THAT, SHE WAS IMPOSSIBLE, AND SHE'S STILL AT HER REBELLIOUS STAGE.
SIGH. WELL, IF YOU'RE HATED, YOU'RE HATED, I SUPPOSE.
EVEN I'D LOSE MY COOL AND GET EASILY ANGRY, SO WE'D FIGHT INCESSANTLY.
BOY, IT WAS TOUGH! THAT TIME, IT FELT AS IF THAT GIRL WAS SEEING RIGHT THROUGH ME.
.....
UM...
WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME WITH ME TO PICK UP MIYA?
YES.
OH! YOU'RE HOME?


IF I INTRODUCE YOU TO THE STAFF AT THE NURSERY SCHOOL...
FROM NOW ON, YOU CAN GO WITH WONDER BEFORE I COME HOME, SINCE WONDER KNOWS THE WAY.
.....
IT'S ONLY IN THE MORNING THAT WE HAVE PRACTICE WITH THE JUNIORS.
NOW THAT I'M IN MY THIRD YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL AND HAVE TO RETIRE FROM BASKET-BALL, I RARELY GO TO PRACTICE.
YOU MEAN YOU WANT *ME* TO PICK UP MIYA?
GASP.
FROM NOW ON...?
OH?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? I'M NOT GOING TO BE AT THAT HOUSE FOREVER, YOU KNOW?
TAIYO MADE IT SEEM LIKE IT WAS GOING TO BE THAT WAY, THOUGH...

AH! OR IS IT BECAUSE HE THINKS THAT I HAVE MONEY?
TAIYO SECRETLY WANTS ME TO LIVE WITH ALL OF YOU SO THAT HE COULD DUMP ALL THE HOUSE RESPONSIBILITIES ONTO ME, I BET!
HAH! IS THAT SO?
HERE WE ARE! MIYA'S NURSERY SCHOOL!
.....
WHINE
HUH?
KAORI OFTEN SAYS!
"GLUE AND OPPORTUNITY"!
WOOF!
MAYBE IT'S MORE LIKE HOW WONDER AND I BECAME PART OF THE FAMILY...
ACTUALLY...

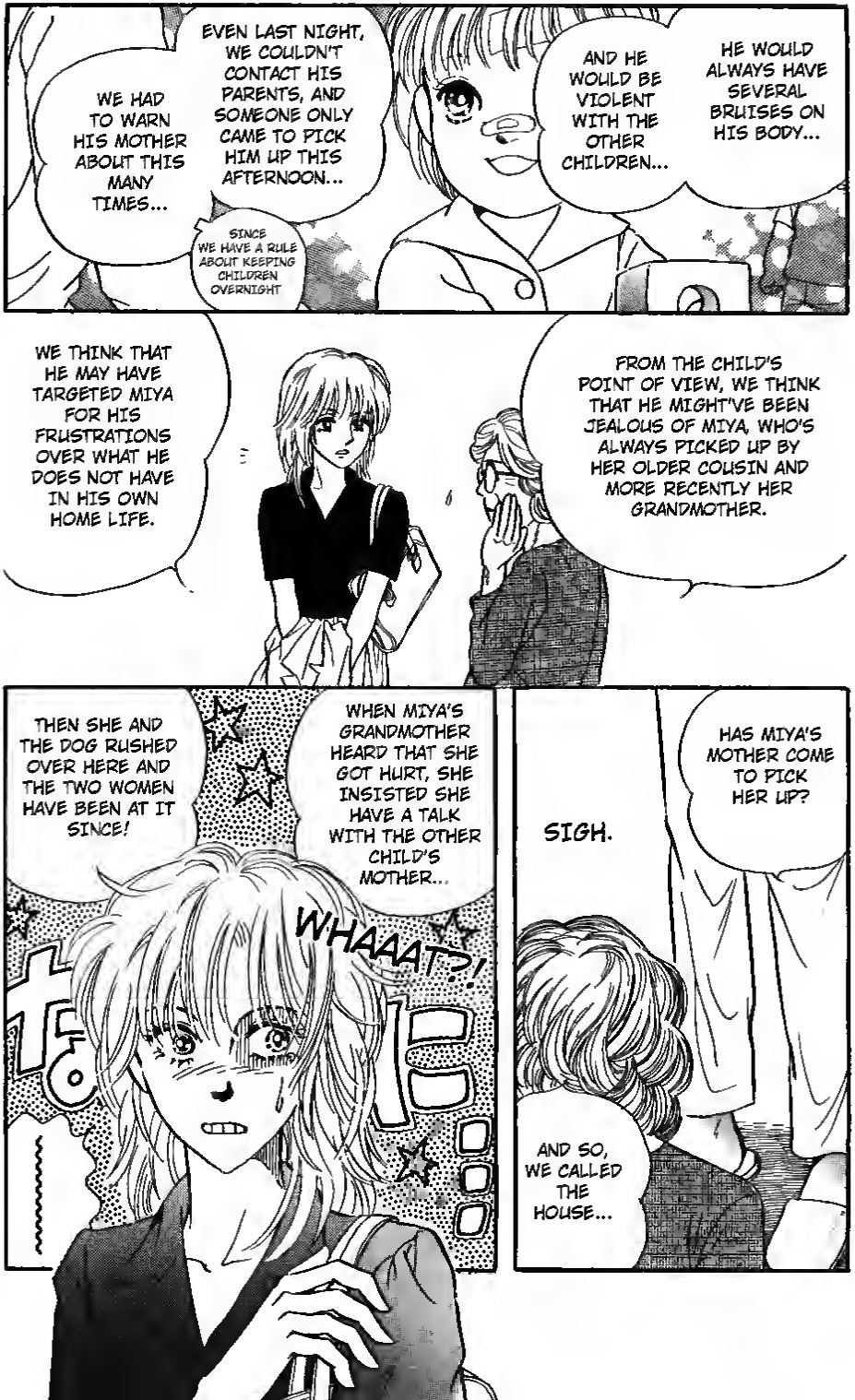
GWAMMY!
KOTA!
GRAMMY?
LOOK WHO'S HERE, MIYA! YOUR GRAMMY ALSO CAME TO PICK YOU UP! ISN'T THAT GREAT?
ISH GOO! GWAMMY WIMMA WIFF ME GO!
WHAT'S SHE SAYING?
STOP DILLY-DALLYING!
WE DON'T HAVE TIME!
IS THAT YOUR FRIEND?
BAIII!

DOES SHE CALL HERSELF A MOTHER?
WOULD YOU LOOK AT THOSE SHOWY CLOTHES!
STARE
WOULD YOU HURRY UP ALREADY?! YOU'RE SO SLOW!
YANK!
YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH ME, YOU OLD HAG?!
HEY!
.....
IF YOU TALK TO OTHER PEOPLE LIKE THAT, NO ONE IS GOING TO WANT TO BE YOUR FRIEND.
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MIYA?!
HEH... IT LOOKS LIKE OTHER PEOPLE CAN HEAR ME BAD-MOUTHING, TOO.
KOTA, JUST REALIZING WHO KAORI'S MOTHER REMINDS HIM OF.

SO SHE PURPOSELY PICKS FIGHTS?
WELL, IT'S MORE LIKE SHE WATCHES HOW THE OTHER PERSON RESPONDS...
SHE PURPOSELY PROVOKES HOSTILITY.
IT'S AS IF SHE'S ALREADY DECIDED FROM THE BEGINNING THAT SHE SHOULD EXPECT PEOPLE TO NOT ACCEPT WHAT SHE HAS TO SAY.
I DON'T KNOW FOR SURE, BUT I GET THAT FEELING FROM HER.
POP IN.
BUT IN REALITY, SHE PROBABLY FEELS LONELY.
HMM...

WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO THIS HOUSE?
YOU DIDN'T REALLY SEEM LIKE YOU WERE WATCHING AND CALCULATING HOW WE RESPONDED TO YOU...
HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?
WELL, I DIDN'T NEED TO.
WONDER WAS ALWAYS THERE FOR ME...
AND I KNEW THAT KAORI WAS LOOKING OUT FOR ME, TOO.
I CAN SEE THAT.
BY THE WAY...
WHO LOOSENED WONDER'S CHAIN?
LATELY, WONDER'S BEEN REALLY GOOD AT THAT.
Z

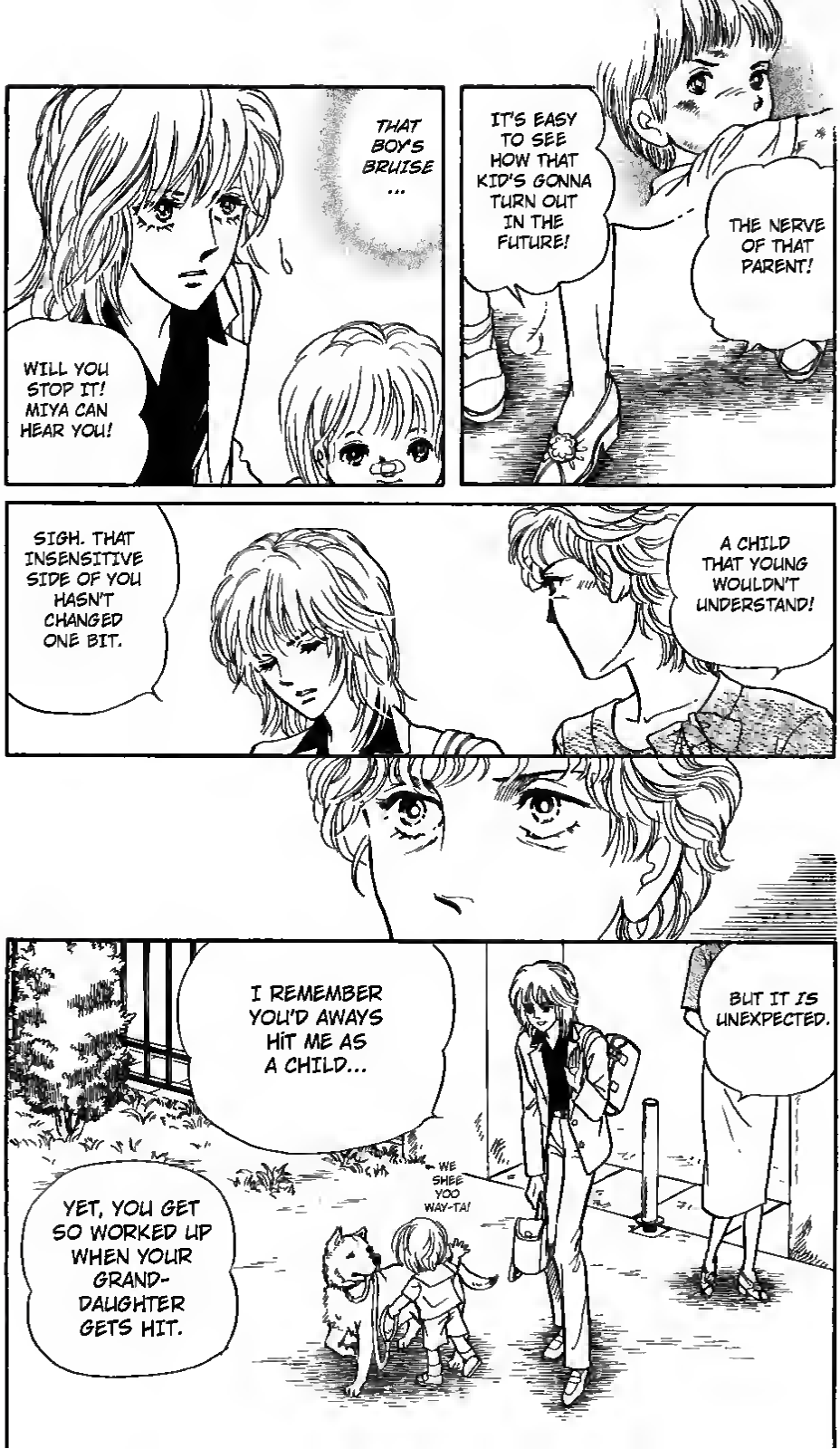
WHAT ?!
MIYA'S INJURED ?!
DASH
DASH
PANT! PANT!
MIYA WAS PLAYING WELL WITH THE OTHER CHILDREN, AS ALWAYS...
BUT THE OTHER CHILD...
HE'S HAD PROBLEMS IN THE PAST, SO WE TRIED TO BE AS CAREFUL AS POSSIBLE...


HE WOULD ALWAYS HAVE SEVERAL BRUISES ON HIS BODY...
AND HE WOULD BE VIOLENT WITH THE OTHER CHILDREN...
EVEN LAST NIGHT, WE COULDN'T CONTACT HIS PARENTS, AND SOMEONE ONLY CAME TO PICK HIM UP THIS AFTERNOON...
SINCE WE HAVE A RULE ABOUT KEEPING CHILDREN OVERNIGHT
WE HAD TO WARN HIS MOTHER ABOUT THIS MANY TIMES...
FROM THE CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW, WE THINK THAT HE MIGHT'VE BEEN JEALOUS OF MIYA, WHO'S ALWAYS PICKED UP BY HER OLDER COUSIN AND MORE RECENTLY HER GRANDMOTHER.
WE THINK THAT HE MAY HAVE TARGETED MIYA FOR HIS FRUSTRATIONS OVER WHAT HE DOES NOT HAVE IN HIS OWN HOME LIFE.
HAS MIYA'S MOTHER COME TO PICK HER UP?
SIGH.
AND SO, WE CALLED THE HOUSE...
WHEN MIYA'S GRANDMOTHER HEARD THAT SHE GOT HURT, SHE INSISTED SHE HAVE A TALK WITH THE OTHER CHILD'S MOTHER...
THEN SHE AND THE DOG RUSHED OVER HERE AND THE TWO WOMEN HAVE BEEN AT IT SINCE!
WHAAAT?!

NOW WHERE'D THAT OLD WOMAN GO?
IT'S GOOD YOU'RE HERE, SINCE TAIYO'S CELL PHONE WAS TURNED OFF AND ALL.
PANT
PANT
WANDA!!
ARF!
ARF!
WONDER ?!
CHATTER
CHATTER
CHATTER
!
SIGH.
OFFICER! TAKE THIS VIOLENT HAG TO THE POLICE STATION!
HEY! WHO CALLED THE POLICE?!
ERR... UM...

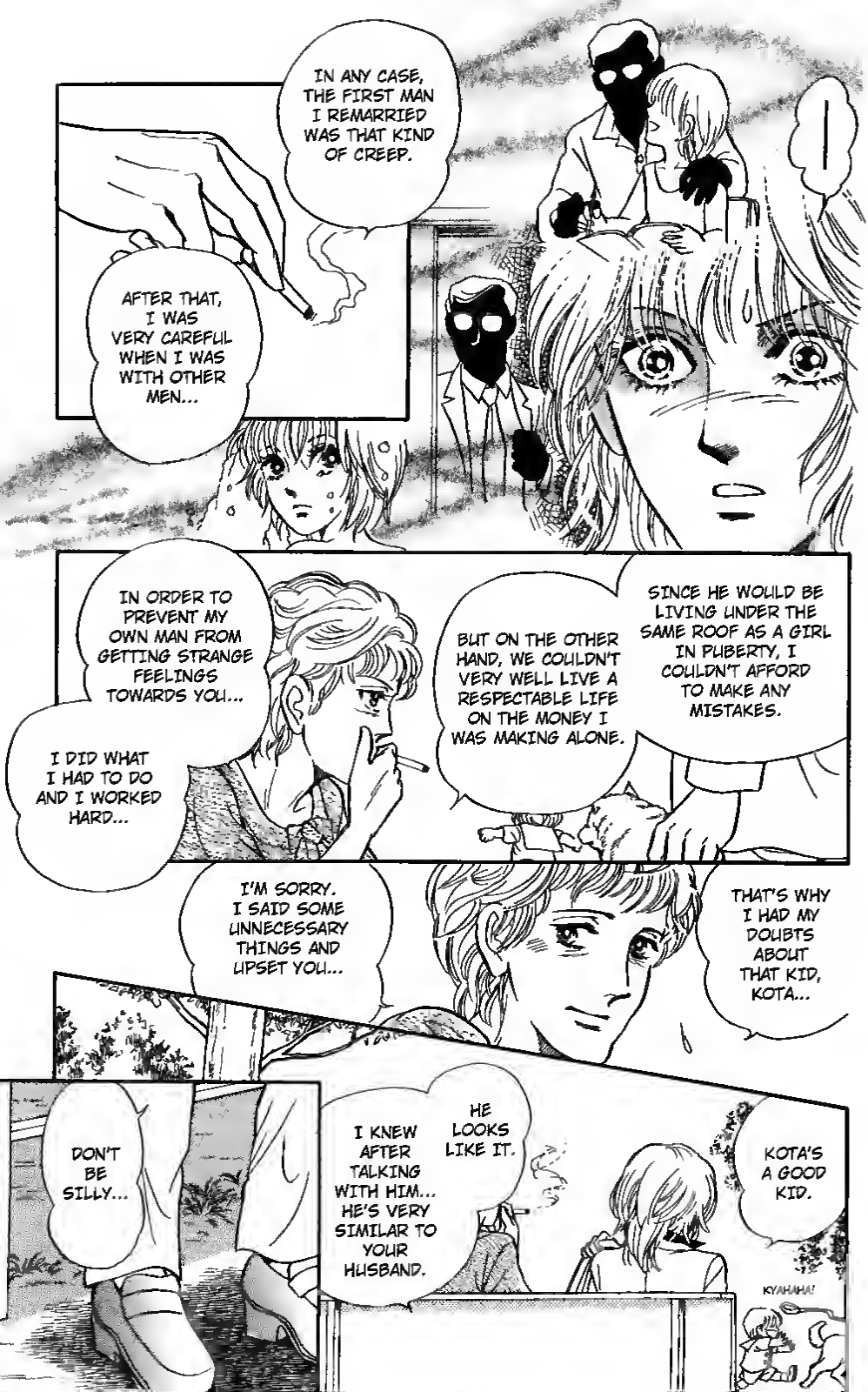
IS HE THE ONE WHO HURT MIYA...?
THAT BOY...
WHY, I'LL KILL YOU!!!
IT'S NO WONDER THAT A BOY ISN'T RAISED PROPERLY WHEN HIS MOTHER IS LIKE THIS!
LOOK! SHE JUST HIT ME ALL OF A SUDDEN!
ARE YOU STUPID? WHY ARE YOU GETTING SO WORKED UP OVER A TRIVIAL CHILDREN'S FIGHT!
EXCUSE ME...
I WAS TRYING TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR ATTITUDE DOES NOT WORK AT ALL!
BOTH OF YOU, PLEASE CALM DOWN...
GET AHOLD OF YOURSELVES !!!
おろおろ
FLUSTERED

HEY! WHO ARE YOU CALLING SENILE?! I'M NOT THAT OLD!
IT'S NOT SOMETHING FOR YOU TO HARASS OTHERS OVER!
MIYA'S CUT WASN'T EVEN THAT BIG OF A DEAL!
I APOLOGIZE FOR THE TROUBLE...
OH, KAORI...
PLEASE UNDERSTAND. SHE'S OLD AND SENILE.
TURN AWAY.
WHAT IS THIS?! LET GO OF ME, YOU MUTT!
.....
GET A MOVE ON!
IT'S NOT A SHOW, TOSHIYA!


THAT BOY'S BRUISE ...
WILL YOU STOP IT! MIYA CAN HEAR YOU!
IT'S EASY TO SEE HOW THAT KID'S GONNA TURN OUT IN THE FUTURE!
THE NERVE OF THAT PARENT!
SIGH. THAT INSENSITIVE SIDE OF YOU HASN'T CHANGED ONE BIT.
A CHILD THAT YOUNG WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND!
I REMEMBER YOU'D AWAYS HIT ME AS A CHILD...
BUT IT IS UNEXPECTED.
YET, YOU GET SO WORKED UP WHEN YOUR GRAND-DAUGHTER GETS HIT.
WE SHEE YOO WAY-TA!

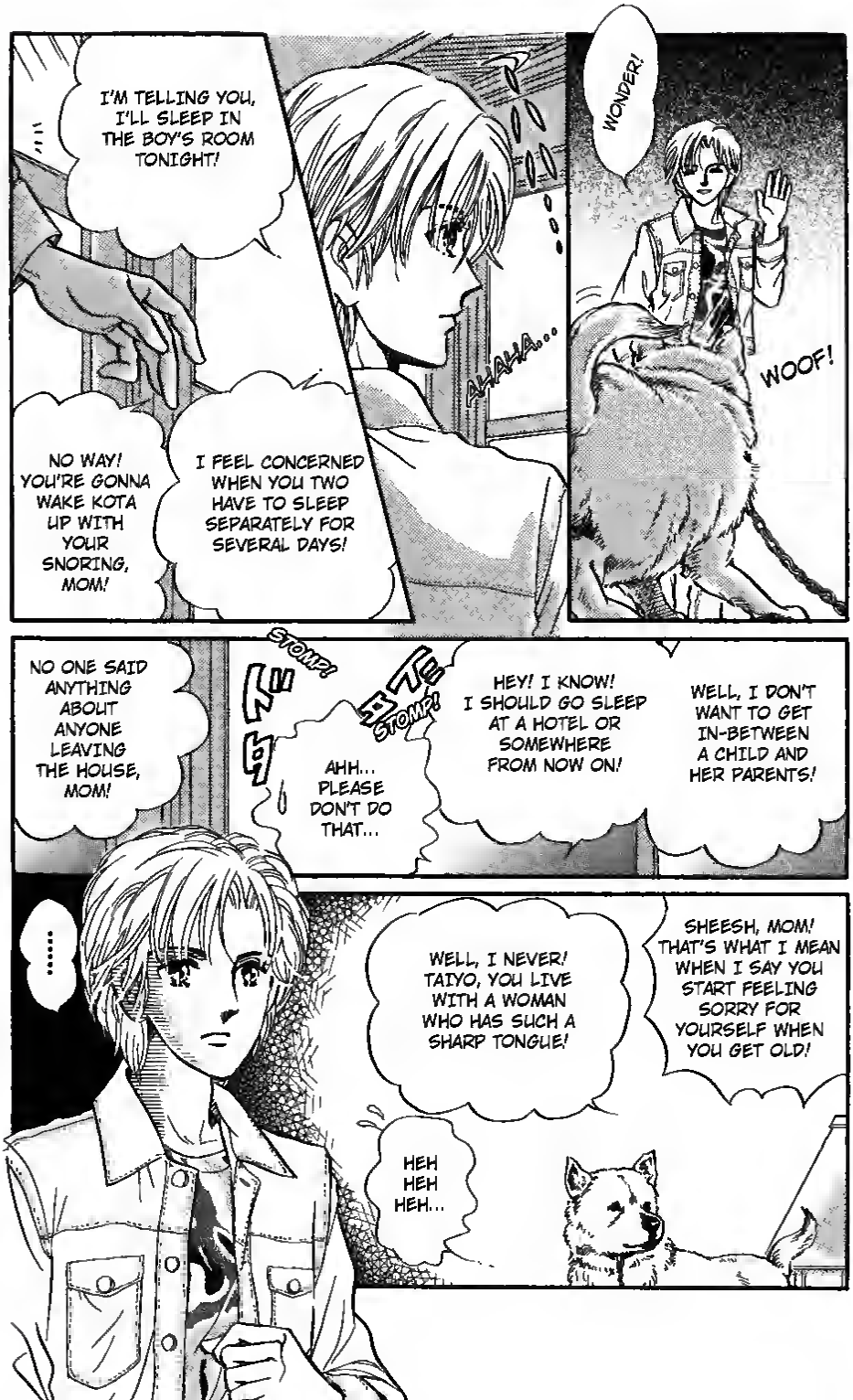
"HARD-SHIP" ?!
CYCLING THROUGH ONE HUSBAND AFTER ANOTHER... THAT WAS "HARDSHIP"?!
WHO DO YOU THINK HELPED YOU GET THROUGH COLLEGE?!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO WAS ALWAYS FIGHTING, WITH YOUR SHARP TONGUE AND ALL. YOU NEVER UNDER-STOOD THE HARDSHIP THAT I WENT THROUGH!
DON'T MAKE IT OUT LIKE YOU REMARRIED FOR ME!
WHEN TAIYO AND I GOT MARRIED, I TOLD HIM WE WERE TO BE SPOUSES WHO WOULD NOT TIE EACH OTHER DOWN.
AND I DIDN'T WANT TO RELY ON HIM FOR THE FINANCES...
IT MIGHT'VE BEEN BECAUSE I GREW UP WATCHING *YOU* LATCH ONTO ONE MAN AFTER ANOTHER.
STILL...
I WAS ALWAYS THINKING OF YOU FIRST.

AFTER YOUR FATHER DIED, I REMARRIED WITH A SUPERIOR IN HIS COMPANY WHO CARED A LOT ABOUT YOU, RIGHT?
HE WAS A NICE MAN WHO YOU WERE QUITE FRIENDLY WITH.
I'M ONLY TELLING YOU THIS BECAUSE YOU'RE GROWN UP...
BUT WHEN YOU WERE IN YOUR SIXTH GRADE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO CONTINUE ON LIVING WITH HIM.
THAT MAN WAS PARTICULARLY KIND TO YOU.
YOU MEAN THE MAN YOU DROVE OUT OF THE FAMILY AFTER FINDING SOMEONE ELSE?
I CAUGHT HIM SEVERAL TIMES TRYING TO LAY A HAND ON YOU BEHIND MY BACK.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?


IN ANY CASE, THE FIRST MAN I REMARRIED WAS THAT KIND OF CREEP.
AFTER THAT, I WAS VERY CAREFUL WHEN I WAS WITH OTHER MEN...
IN ORDER TO PREVENT MY OWN MAN FROM GETTING STRANGE FEELINGS TOWARDS YOU...
I DID WHAT I HAD TO DO AND I WORKED HARD...
BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, WE COULDN'T VERY WELL LIVE A RESPECTABLE LIFE ON THE MONEY I WAS MAKING ALONE.
SINCE HE WOULD BE LIVING UNDER THE SAME ROOF AS A GIRL IN PUBERTY, I COULDN'T AFFORD TO MAKE ANY MISTAKES.
I'M SORRY. I SAID SOME UNNECESSARY THINGS AND UPSET YOU...
THAT'S WHY I HAD MY DOUBTS ABOUT THAT KID, KOTA...
DON'T BE SILLY...
I KNEW AFTER TALKING WITH HIM... HE'S VERY SIMILAR TO YOUR HUSBAND.
HE LOOKS LIKE IT.
KOTA'S A GOOD KID.
KYAHAHA!

MAW-MEE?
MOMMY'S NOT CRYING, MIYA HONEY!
IT'S NOTHING, DEAR. YOUR MOTHER JUST GOT SOME DUST IN HER EYE, THAT'S ALL...
I DIDN'T KNOW ANY OF THIS AT ALL!
SO I MISUNDER-STOOD YOU THIS WHOLE TIME...?

AT THE NURSERY SCHOOL ?!
SHE GOT INJURED ...?!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT, MIYA? YOU'RE NOT HURT?!
SHE MADE A BIG SCENE.
DON'T WORRY. I GOT ANGRY AT THE OTHER PARENT FOR YOU.
GEEHEE!
WHA?!
WE CAN NEVER SEEM TO GET A HOLD OF YOU AT THE MOST CRUCIAL TIMES, YOU KNOW.
IT WAS A RELIEF THAT IT WASN'T ANYTHING SERIOUS...
I WAS ENTERTAINING A CLIENT AFTER THE MEETING TODAY.
ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME FOR YOU TO TUCK MIYA INTO BED?
HM?
DO YOU WANT A BEER, TOO, MOM?
THERE'S A PEACEFUL AIR ABOUT YOU TWO...
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TODAY?


I'M TELLING YOU, I'LL SLEEP IN THE BOY'S ROOM TONIGHT!
AHAHA...
WONDER!
WOOF!
NO WAY! YOU'RE GONNA WAKE KOTA UP WITH YOUR SNORING, MOM!
I FEEL CONCERNED WHEN YOU TWO HAVE TO SLEEP SEPARATELY FOR SEVERAL DAYS!
NO ONE SAID ANYTHING ABOUT ANYONE LEAVING THE HOUSE, MOM!
STOMP!
STOMP!
AHH... PLEASE DON'T DO THAT...
HEY! I KNOW! I SHOULD GO SLEEP AT A HOTEL OR SOMEWHERE FROM NOW ON!
WELL, I DON'T WANT TO GET IN-BETWEEN A CHILD AND HER PARENTS!
.....
WELL, I NEVER! TAIYO, YOU LIVE WITH A WOMAN WHO HAS SUCH A SHARP TONGUE!
SHEESH, MOM! THAT'S WHAT I MEAN WHEN I SAY YOU START FEELING SORRY FOR YOURSELF WHEN YOU GET OLD!
HEH HEH HEH...

IN ANY OTHER CASE, YOU'D BE TREATED LIKE A TROUBLE-MAKER...
SNIFFooo
IF ANYONE IS GETTING IN-BETWEEN A CHILD AND THEIR PARENTS... IT'S ME.
GOOD NIGHT, WONDER.
I'M GONNA GO BACK AND STAY AT THE SNACK BAR.
I'LL SEE YOU TOMO-RROW!

END OF CHAPTER 6

WONDER!

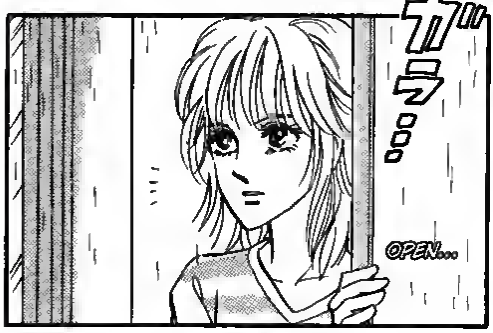
WONDER!

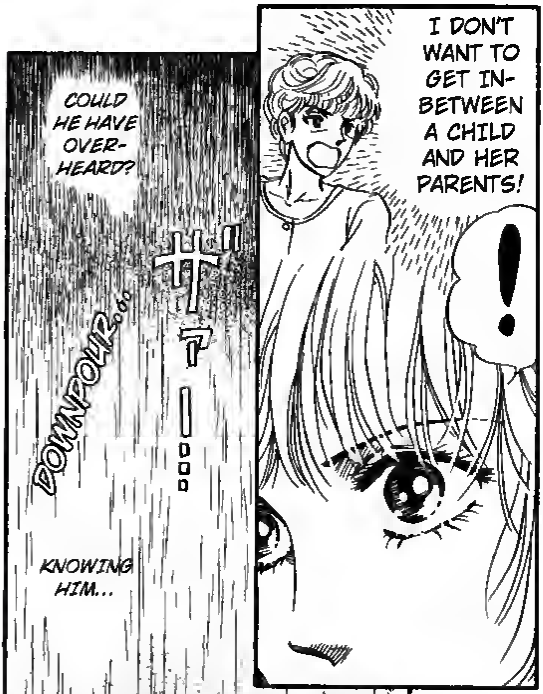
-CHAPTER 7-

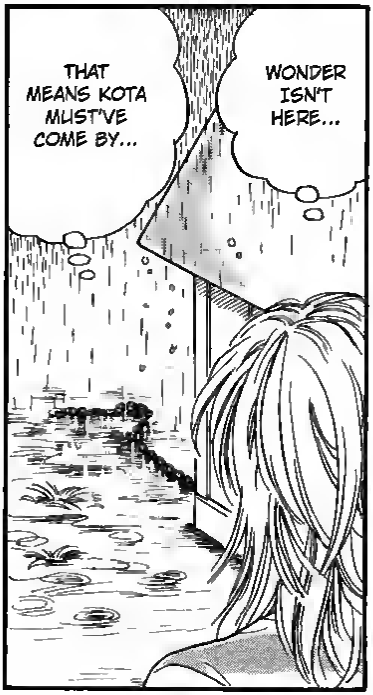
DOWNPOUR...
F
PLINK
PLINK
THE SNACK BAR OWNER TOLD ME I COULD STAY AT THE SNACK BAR TONIGHT...
YEA... SINCE IT'S RAINING AND ALL...
DOWNPOUR...
MM-HM... GOOD NIGHT!
I'LL COME BACK HOME TOMORROW BEFORE I GO TO SCHOOL...

THAT'S RARE... KOTA HARDLY EVER SLEEPS OUTSIDE.
OH? ISN'T THAT COMMON FOR YOUNG BOYS HIS AGE?

.....


ガラ...
OPEN...


I DON'T WANT TO GET IN-BETWEEN A CHILD AND HER PARENTS!
!


WONDER ISN'T HERE...
THAT MEANS KOTA MUST'VE COME BY...

COULD HE HAVE OVER-HEARD?
ザー...
DOWNPOUR...
KNOWING HIM...

RAINooo
ザー
ア ア
TV
TV
週刊
HEY, LOOK? IS THAT DOG HOMELESS?
そそっ
SNEAK AWAY.
NO HE WASN'T! THERE WASN'T A LEASH ON HIM!
……!
YEAH, RIGHT! YOU SHOULD GET YOUR EYES CHECKED!
33
WELCOME! GOOD EVENING!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?! HE'S PROPERLY TIED UP, YOU IDIOT!
WHAT?
ひょと
STICK

PANT
PANT
PANT
WHY DID YOU TAKE OFF YOUR CHAIN?!
I DIDN'T RUN AWAY FROM HOME, SO THERE ISN'T ANYTHING FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT–
WOOF!
WONDER!
TOSHIYA!
HURRY UP AND COME INSIDE, OR YOU'RE GONNA GET WET!
WHY IS SHE WALKING WITH HER KID AT THIS LATE HOUR?
IT'S THAT BOY AND HIS MOTHER...

RIP
CHOC
AND
C
E
ミシ
……!

NO!
OR IT'S NOT YOURS.
YOU HAVE TO BUY IT FIRST ...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, TOSHIYA ?!
JOLT
WHY ARE YOU GRABBING FOOD FROM THE STORE WITHOUT TELLING ME!!
DO YOU WANT TO BE TAUGHT ANOTHER LESSON?!
EXCUSE ME...

SLAP!
UH... YES MA'AM.
AND MAKE IT SNAPPY!
ADD THIS WITH THE OTHERS!
WAAAAH!
AHHH!
POUR...
ザー

SLAM!
……
HURRY UP!
TOSHIYA!
WHIMPER
HINAMI, IS THAT YOU?
VROOM...
VROOM...
HUH?
SAWAKI.
ARF!
ARE YOU WALKING WONDER?
IN THIS RAIN?!

KAORI...
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
CHIEP!
CHIEP!
WHERE THE HELL WERE YOU ?!?!
UH ...
YOU ALWAYS TELL US NOT TO WORRY...
YET WE HAVE NO CLUE WHERE ON EARTH YOU WERE!
ガラ
OH... YOU'RE BACK.

WONDER!

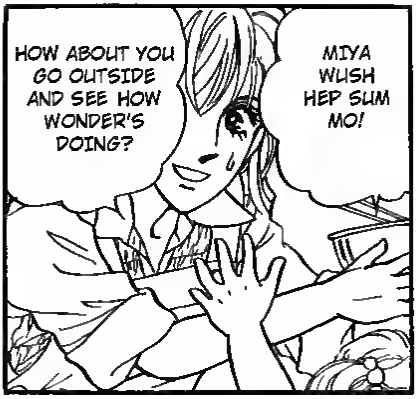
HE GETS THE CONVER-SATION, HUH...
YOO TOO WIB WABBIN TOGE-HWAA?
THAT'S RIGHT, MIYA! WE DID LOTS OF WALKING AND NOW WONDER'S HUNGRY, TOO!
KOTAAA!
WHAT ON EARTH IS YOUR MOTHER SCREAMING ABOUT THIS EARLY IN THE MORNING, MIYA?
WAN-DAAA!
WOOF!
MORNING!
AH! THANKS!
WELL..
ISH GOO, YESH?
CHOMP!
がぶ
CHOMP!
がぶ
SO WHERE DID YOU END UP STAYING?!
MM!
がぶ
CHOMP!
YOU SPENT THE NIGHT AT SAWAKI'S ?!

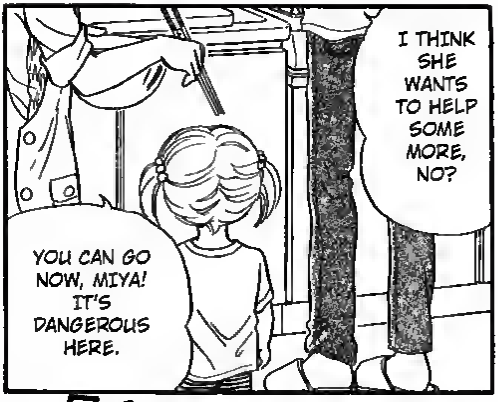
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING, EXACTLY?
IN FACT, WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL ME, SAWAKI?!
YOU LEFT ME OUT, YOU SNEAK!
UNBELIEVABLE!
YOU'RE JEALOUS?!
I PICKED HIM UP ON THE STREET AND HE SLEPT OVER.
WELL, WONDER SLEPT OVER, TOO.
WHY DIDN'T YOU CALL ME?! YOU COULD'VE SLEPT AT MY HOUSE!!!
ERR... KAORI SAID NO MORE SLEEPOVERS.
WHAT AM I TO THIS GIRL?
HINAMI, DO COME AND SLEEP OVER AT MY PLACE, TONIGHT!
OH, WELCOME HOME.

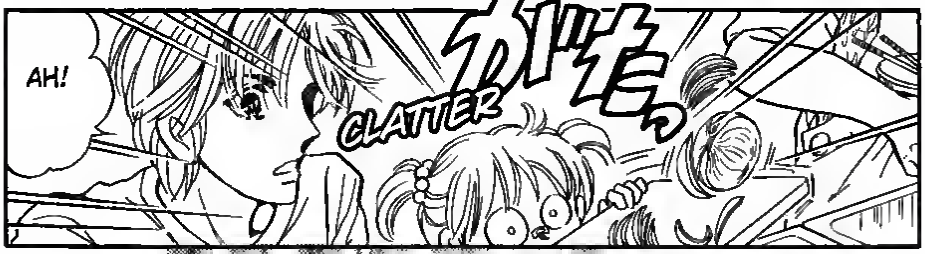
I'LL BE HAVING DINNER OUTSIDE, SO DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME!
TAKE CARE, THEN!
I'LL BE OUT FOR THE DAY, SO...
CAN YOU GO AND PICK UP MIYA?
UH, SURE!
GOOD BYE!
WOOF!
?

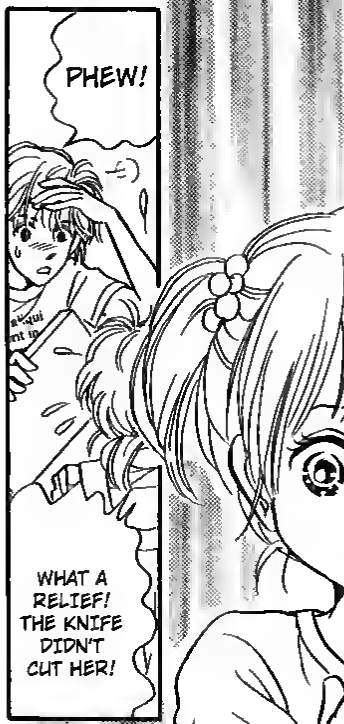
dat a natura proficis facile
est appetit anim ned ullam
ellit sensar luptae epicur i
ea in natuon sit et parvos
in es nian doler, non solu
est appetit anim ned ullam
ellit sensa luptae epicur
ea parvo.
ALL I DID WAS WARN HER ABOUT TOSHIYA PUSHING ANOTHER CHILD...
WHAT'S GOING ON?
GULP
MIYA! YOUR BIG COUSIN IS HERE TO PICK YOU UP!
FINE, THEN! WE JUST WON'T COME ANYMORE!
SCREW THIS PLACE!

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, MIYA!
ISH DUULIN!
MIYA, CAN YOU TAKE THIS TO THE TABLE FOR MOMMY, PLEASE?
YESH'M!
BUT EVEN IF HE DOES GET HIT, HE STILL DESPERATELY FOLLOWS HIS MOM...
I ALSO NOTICED THAT BOY...
WHAT'LL HAPPEN TO THAT BOY IF HE NO LONGER GOES TO THE NURSERY SCHOOL...
OHHHH!
HUH? WHAT?
HE HAD BRUISES ALL OVER HIS FACE AND ARMS.


HOW ABOUT YOU GO OUTSIDE AND SEE HOW WONDER'S DOING?
MIYA WUSH HEP SUM MO!


I THINK SHE WANTS TO HELP SOME MORE, NO?
YOU CAN GO NOW, MIYA! IT'S DANGEROUS HERE.


AH!
CLATTER
カゲセっ


PHEW!
WHAT A RELIEF! THE KNIFE DIDN'T CUT HER!

FWIP!
FALL

THAT'S WHY MOMMY SAID IT WAS DANGEROUS, OKAY?
THAT WAS SCARY, NOW, WASN'T IT?
BUT THANK YOU FOR TRYING TO HELP.
I DON'T REMEMBER YOU EVEN HITTING ME ONCE!
YOU NEVER REALLY GOT ANGRY AT ME WHEN I WAS A KID, EITHER.
HUH?
ISH DENGEROOSH, OKAY?

HITTING A CHILD IS NOT A FORM OF DISCIPLINE, NOR DOES IT HAVE ANY POWER TO PERSUADE.
THAT'S BECAUSE I WAS OFTEN HIT BY MY MOTHER.
BUT THAT WOMAN HAD A LOT OF HER OWN PROBLEMS, AND PROBABLY LET HER EMOTIONS GET THE BEST OF HER.
IT HURTS A CHILD'S CONFIDENCE, AND ENCOURAGES NOTHING BUT FEAR AND REBELLION.
JUST BECAUSE SOME-ONE'S A PARENT ...
DOESN'T GIVE THEM THE RIGHT TO BE VIOLENT.
IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S OUT SOMEWHERE.
HOW ABOUT YOUR MOTHER?
TO YOUR CREDIT, IT WAS A REALLY EFFECTIVE PUNCH.
PRRR
ALTHOUGH KAORI DID ONCE HIT ME IN THE FACE.
AH! YOU'RE HOME!
IT'S HER?! WHERE IS THAT OLD WOMAN!
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL...
EEP! DID I?

YOU KNOW WHAT? DON'T GIVE ME YOUR HALF-HEARTED NONSENSE AND PRETEND TO CARE ABOUT HOW I FEEL!
JUST BECAUSE YOU WERE HOME ALONE ALL DAY DOESN'T MEAN-...
WHY ARE YOU ACTING LIKE KOTA NOW?
YOU'RE AT A HOTEL WITH ANOTHER MAN?!
YOU'RE NOT COMING HOME TONIGHT?! WHAT IS THIS?!
.....
... SHE TOLD ME NOT TO INTERRUPT HER DATE AND THEN HUNG UP.
A ROOM?
アイ

I TOLD THEM BY MISTAKE THAT YOU NEVER RETURNED HERE.
WHEN I GOT A CALL FROM YOUR FAMILY LATE THAT NIGHT...
I RAN INTO A FELLOW CLASSMATE...
WELL, KAORI WAS VERY WORRIED. SHE THOUGHT SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAD HAPPENED TO YOU!
IF IT GETS CLEANED UP, IT WOULDN'T BE A BAD PLACE TO LIVE, YOU KNOW?
RIGHT NOW, THE SECOND FLOOR IS USED FOR STORAGE, BUT...
BEFORE I MOVED TO AN APARTMENT, I USED TO LIVE UP THERE ALL THE TIME.
WELCOME!
WELL, IF YOU THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE, IT MIGHT NOT BE SO BAD FOR YOU TO STAND ON YOUR OWN FEET EARLY.
BESIDES, IF YOU STAY HERE, YOUR UNCLE WILL FEEL RELIEVED AND I COULD LEND MY HELP, TOO.
.....
WHERE THE HELL WERE YOU?!
THANK YOU, BUT...
I THINK I STILL WANT TO STAY WITH THEM FOR NOW.

WHO WILL WATCH OVER HIM?
WHAT ABOUT THAT BOY?
.....
SINCE SHE TOOK HIM TO THE STORE AT NIGHT...
IT MIGHT HAPPEN AGAIN.

!
AT THIS HOUR ...
COULD SHE REALLY HAVE LEFT HIM ALONE IN THE APARTMENT?!
PARLOR
RING
HE'S NOT WITH HER ...?!

SOB...
SOB...
TURN.
.....!
TOSHIYA?
SNIFF.

WHAT THE?!

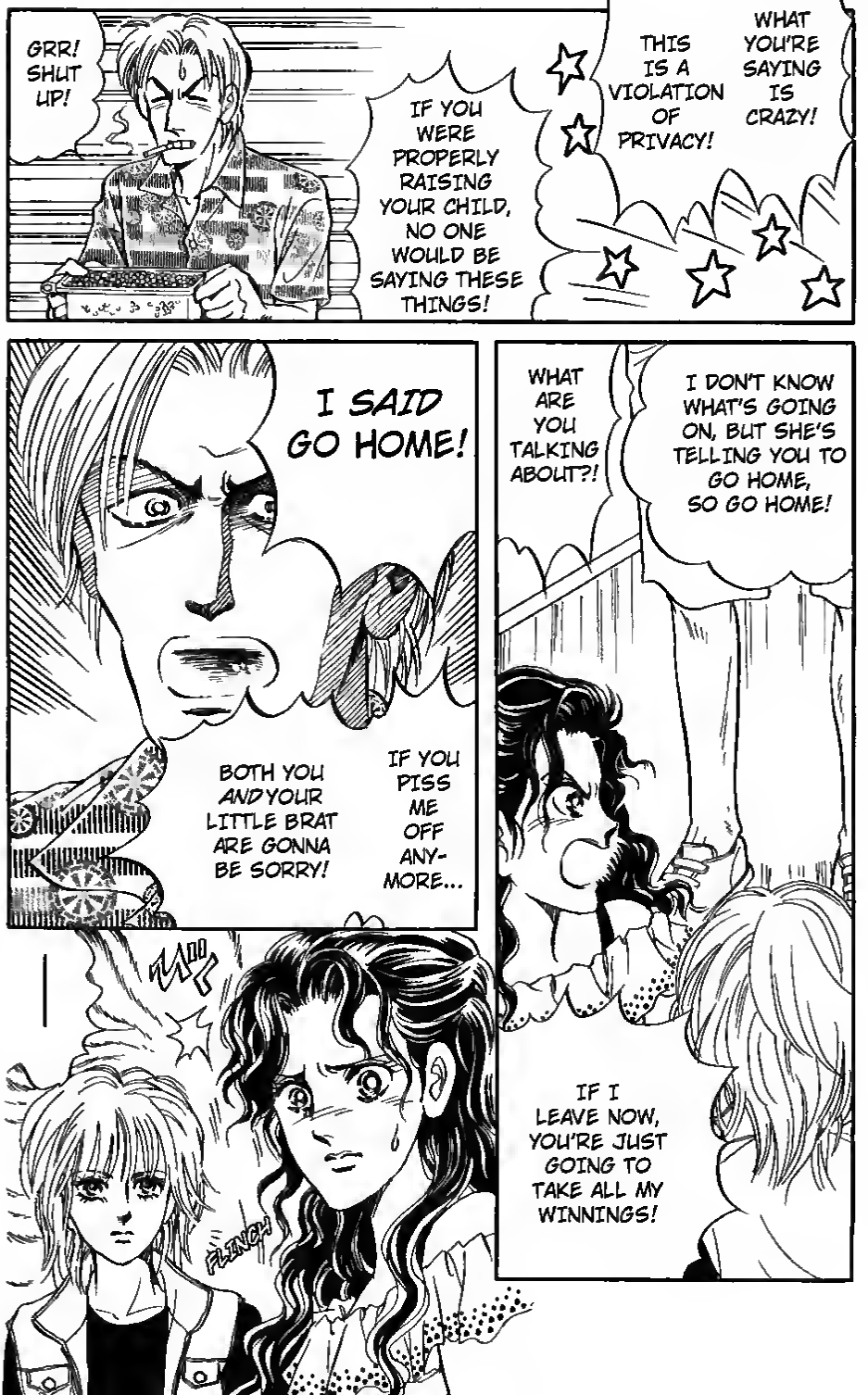
I'LL HEAD THERE RIGHT AWAY!
OKAY!
HUH?
YOU'RE GOING SOMEWHERE AT THIS HOUR?
YEAH. I WON'T BE LONG.
THAT PHONE CALL... DID SOMETHING HAPPEN TO YOUR MOTHER?
DON'T WORRY, TAIYO! I'M TAKING WONDER WITH ME!
WATCH MIYA FOR ME, OKAY?
RATTLE
URK! IT'S NOT THE TIME OF NIGHT FOR A WOMAN TO BE GOING OUT ALONE, YOU KNOW!
HEY!
IT WAS KOTA?
OH?
THAT WAS KOTA. HE SAYS HE NEEDS ME.

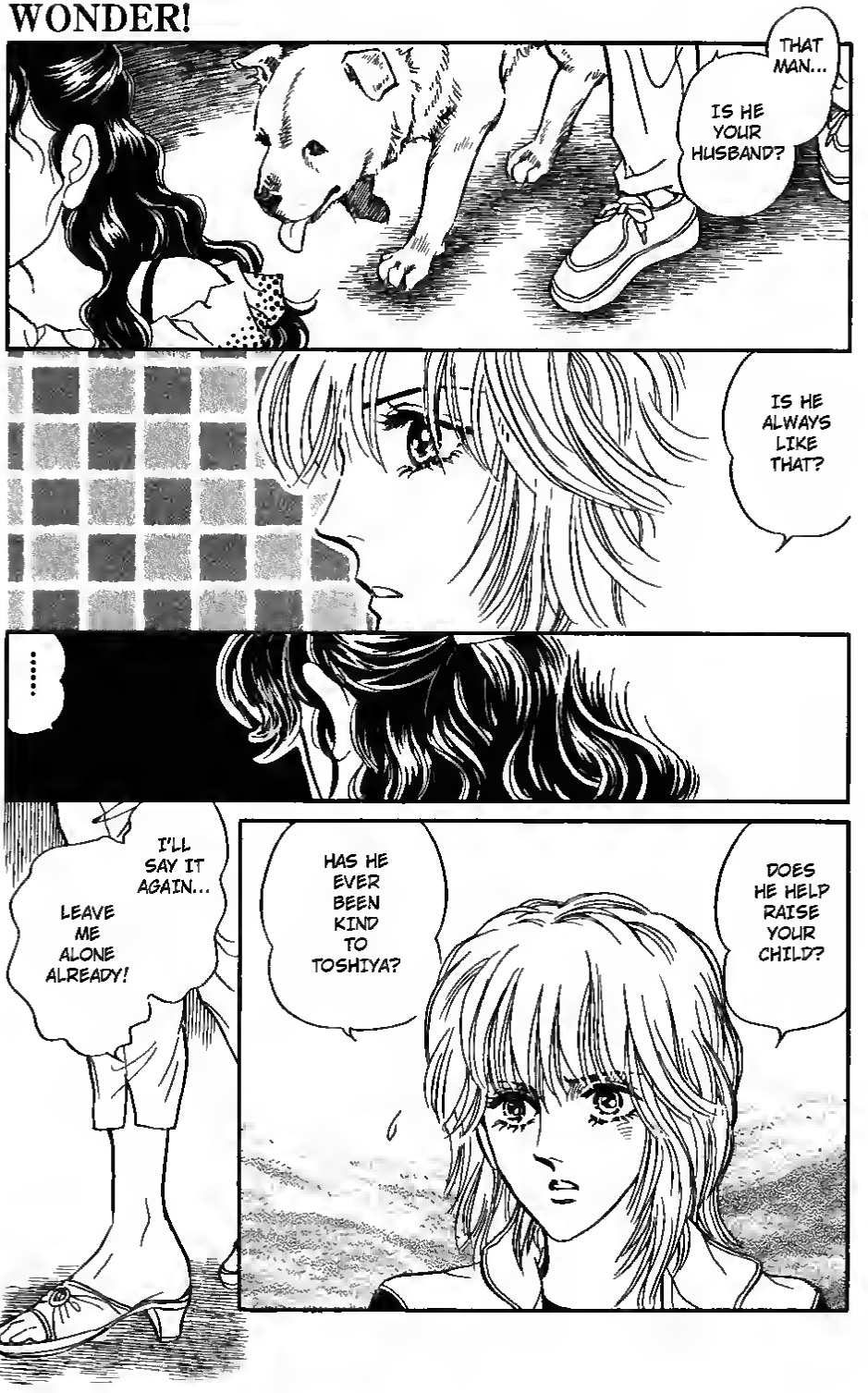
PACHINKO
SO THIS IS THE PACHINKO PARLOR THAT KOTA SAID THAT WOMAN WENT INSIDE ...?
ARF!
WAIT FOR ME HERE, WONDER.
WOOF!

GOOD EVENING.
TOSHIYA'S MOTHER?
!
.....
WHAT DO YOU WANT ?!
WHY ISN'T TOSHIYA WITH YOU?
KAORI, WHAT NOW?
HE'S QUIETLY SLEEPING AT THE APARTMENT!
THAT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

JUST SO THAT YOU COULD HAVE FUN BY YOURSELF...
HOW COULD SHE DO THIS?!
YOU CAN'T LEAVE HER ALONE!
YOU TIE UP YOUR CHILD WHO ISN'T EVEN THREE YEARS OLD?!
YOU'VE BEEN ALL UP IN MY BUSINESS SINCE BEFORE!
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?!
WHAP!
R-RAISING YOUR OWN KID IS A LOT OF TROUBLE!

HOW DARE YOU?!
DO YOU NORMALLY HIT PEOPLE WITH PACHINKO BALLS?
OUR KOTA FOUND HIM, AND CALLED ME.
STOP STICKING YOUR NOSE IN MY BUSINESS!
HE'S WITH TOSHIYA AT YOUR PLACE NOW. APPARENTLY YOUR APARTMENT DOOR WAS UNLOCKED.
THEN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THIS ANNOYING WOMAN!
SHUT UP! YOU'RE BREAKING MY CONCEN-TRATION!
TAKE IT OUTSIDE!
WHAT IS THIS?!
IT'S YOUR CHILD THAT WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT! IF YOU DON'T GO BACK HOME IMMEDIATELY, WE'LL TAKE TOSHIYA HOME WITH US!


GRR! SHUT UP!
IF YOU WERE PROPERLY RAISING YOUR CHILD, NO ONE WOULD BE SAYING THESE THINGS!
THIS IS A VIOLATION OF PRIVACY!
WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS CRAZY!
I SAID GO HOME!
BOTH YOU AND YOUR LITTLE BRAT ARE GONNA BE SORRY!
IF YOU PISS ME OFF ANY-MORE...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT SHE'S TELLING YOU TO GO HOME, SO GO HOME!
IF I LEAVE NOW, YOU'RE JUST GOING TO TAKE ALL MY WINNINGS!
FLINCH

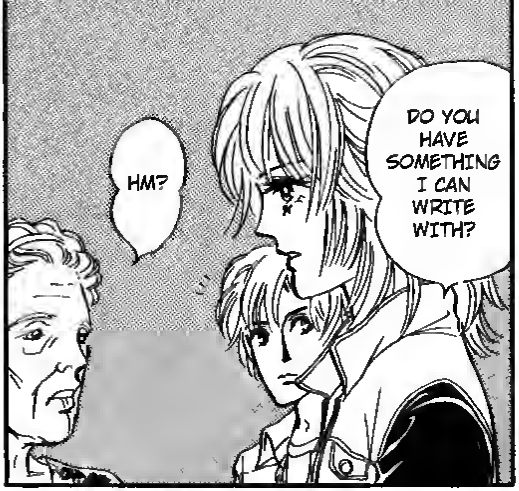

THAT MAN...
IS HE YOUR HUSBAND?
IS HE ALWAYS LIKE THAT?
.....
I'LL SAY IT AGAIN...
LEAVE ME ALONE ALREADY!
HAS HE EVER BEEN KIND TO TOSHIYA?
DOES HE HELP RAISE YOUR CHILD?

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW, THEN?
LIKE I SAID, IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!!
LISTEN! I'M SORRY THAT TOSHIYA HIT YOUR KID!
WE WON'T BE GOING TO THAT NURSERY SCHOOL ANY MORE SO DON'T YOU WORRY!
DO YOU...
DO YOU NOT CARE ABOUT TOSHIYA?
IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL!
BUT SOMETIMES... HE GETS ON MY NERVE!
AND HE NEVER LISTENS TO ANYTHING I SAY.
HE'LL CRY RIGHT AWAY... AND HE DOESN'T LIKE THAT MAN.
AND ME? I HAVE SO MANY THINGS ON MY HANDS BUT SINCE I HAVE TOSHIYA ON TOP OF THAT...!

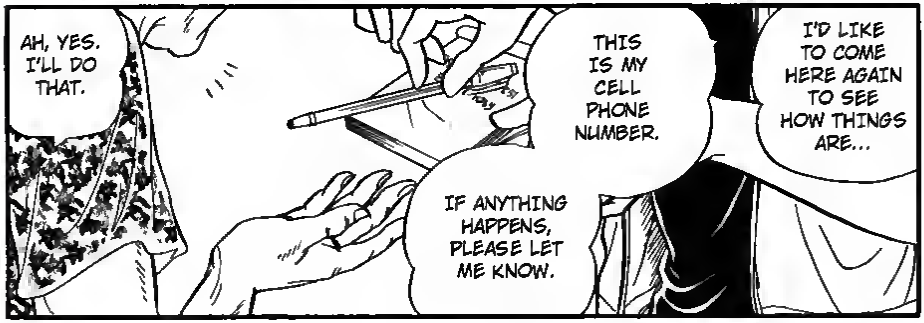
STILL ...
THE ONLY PERSON THAT BOY HAS IS YOU...
BUT EVEN IF HE GETS HIT, HE STILL DESPERATELY FOLLOWS HIS MOTHER AROUND...
WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?!
WILL YOU SHUT IT ALREADY?!
I KNOW THAT!
WONDER WANTS TO GO THIS WAY.
OH! THIS IS WONDER, BY THE WAY.
I DIDN'T ASK!
WOOF!
GIGGLE...
!

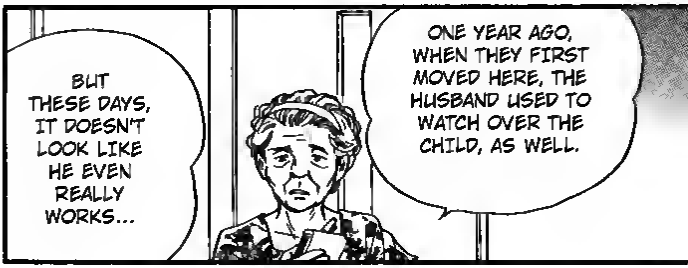
!
I
KOTA
...
SHOCK
GET OUT!
I'M GONNA CALL THE POLICE!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HOUSE?!

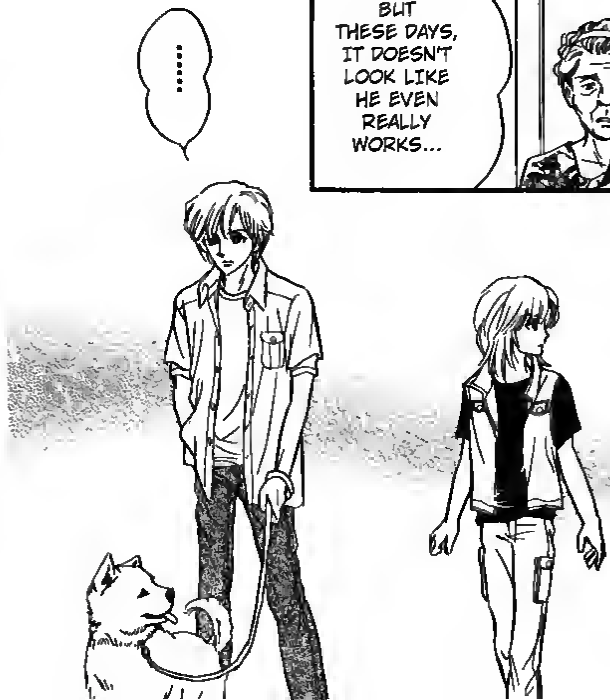
DON'T COME HERE EVER AGAIN!
SLAM
LOOK
SHOVE
!
.....
CRASH!!
WAAAAH!!
IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THIS.
WHISPER
IF YOU TRY TO WARN HER EVEN A LITTLE BIT, SHE'LL START SCREAMING AND WANTING TO FIGHT...
IT'S FRIGHTENING.
THE WHOLE NEIGHBOR-HOOD IS QUITE CONCERNED.


HM?
DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING I CAN WRITE WITH?

WE COULD CALL CHILD CARE SERVICES...
BUT IF THINGS TURN SOUR, WHO KNOWS WHAT SHE'LL DO TO THE REST OF US?


AH, YES. I'LL DO THAT.
THIS IS MY CELL PHONE NUMBER.
IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.
I'D LIKE TO COME HERE AGAIN TO SEE HOW THINGS ARE...


BUT THESE DAYS, IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE EVEN REALLY WORKS...
ONE YEAR AGO, WHEN THEY FIRST MOVED HERE, THE HUSBAND USED TO WATCH OVER THE CHILD, AS WELL.


.....

YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE, KOTA.
I'M SORRY, KAORI.
YOU HAVE WORK TOMORROW AND I GOT YOU INVOLVED.
I WAS ALREADY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS.
I THINK WHAT I DID TODAY WAS UNNECESS-ARY...
WHAT ?
BUT... YOU KNOW?
.....
REALLY ...
LOOKED LIKE HE WAS HAVING A LOT OF FUN PLAYING WITH YOU.
THAT CHILD...
IT'S NOTHING ...

WHEN YOU SAW HIM...
IT MIGHT'VE REMINDED YOU OF YOURSELF WHEN YOU HAD WAITED ALONE FOR YOUR MOTHER TO RETURN LATE AT NIGHT...
DON'T LEAVE HER ALONE!
WHAT NOW?
WHEN WE FIRST SAW YOU... WHEN YOU FELT SO LONELY...
THAT'S WHY YOU COULDN'T LOOK AWAY AND DO NOTHING.

IN THE SAME WAY, I THINK YOU STAYED BESIDE THAT BOY TO COMFORT HIM...
WONDER CASUALLY CAME AND SNUGGLED BESIDE YOU.
KOTA...
YOU'VE REALLY GROWN.
HUH ?
IN FACT, I THINK YOU'VE GROWN TOO MUCH...
WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
WHEN'D YOU GET THIS TALL?!

BAWOO!
ARE YOU GOING OUT AGAIN?
I BORROWED YOUR BLOUSE!
OOOH!
DO YOU KNOW THAT YOUR ENTIRE WARDROBE IS DRAB?
WHAT-EVER...
TAKE CARE!
I'LL BE BACK WITH SOMETHING FOR YOU, OKAY, MIYA?
YOU, TOO, KOTA!
SHAY KEA!
WOOF!
WAS THAT JUST SOME RANDOM REMARK?
WHAAA?
SHE MIGHT REALLY HAVE A NEW BOYFRIEND.
COMMON SENSE IS NOT COMMON WITH THAT WOMAN...
EXACTLY HOW OLD IS YOUR MOTHER AGAIN?

WAOOOOO!
WAOOOOO!
OH!
UH... THAT'S NOT A QUESTION YOU SHOULD BE ASKING "WHY" TO?
WHY?
IT'S SUNDAY. DON'T YOU NEED TO BE STUDYING FOR YOUR TEST?
PLUS, YOU'RE FREE NOW THAT BASKETBALL IS OVER...
THAT'S RIGHT. IT'S THE SIREN OF AN AMBU-LANCE.
ISHA AMBOO-WAMBOO!
PI-IL-IL-!
RINGooo
...WHAT?!
YES, THIS IS KAORI HINAMI.

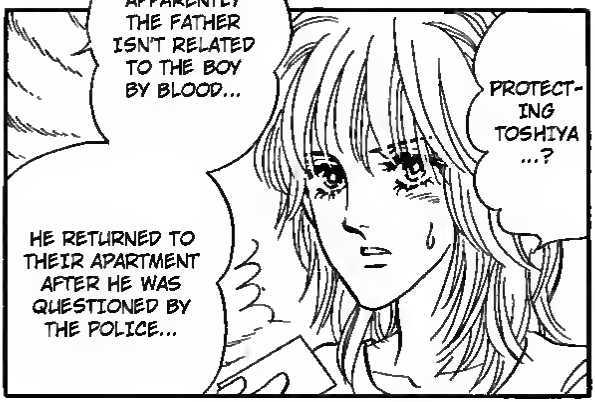
LAST NIGHT...
THE HUSBAND CAME HOME VERY DRUNK...
THE WHOLE NIGHT, I COULD HEAR HIM BREAKING AND HITTING THINGS.
SINCE AROUND DAYBREAK... THE BOY IS NO LONGER CRYING...
TOSHIYA?!
END OF CHAPTER 7

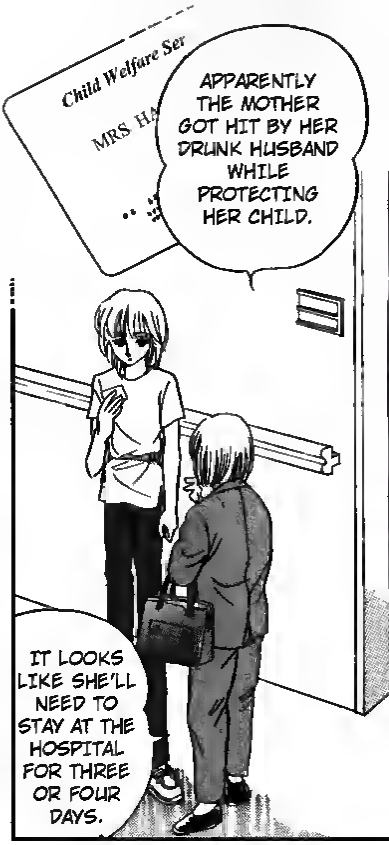
WONDER!

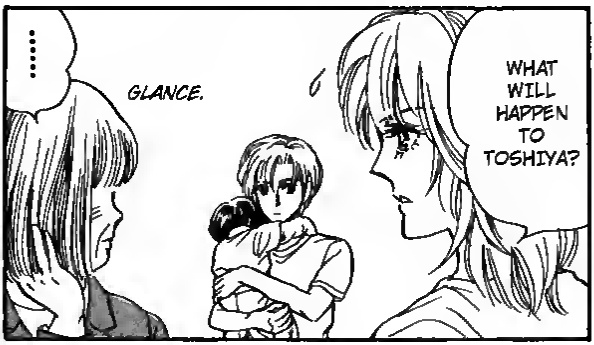
-CHAPTER 8-

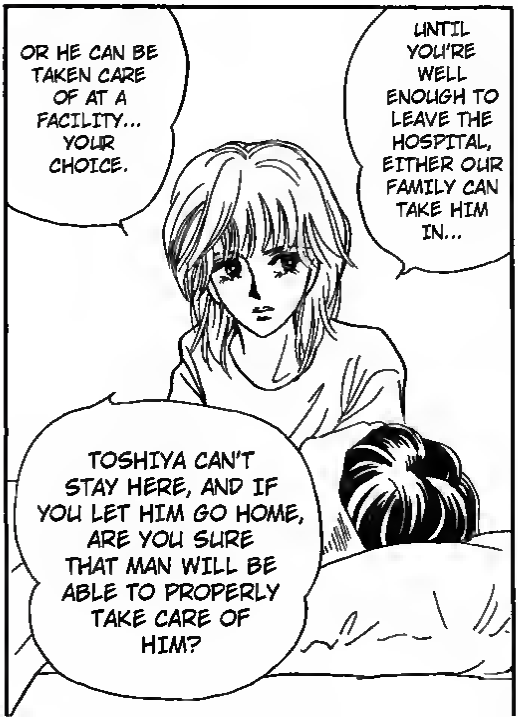
KOTA!
HE'S ON THE SECOND FLOOR!
HOSPITAL
I DON'T KNOW *WHAT* YOU MIGHT'VE HEARD FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD HAG, BUT THE PUBLIC OFFICE AND THE POLICE HAVE *NO* BUSINESS HERE!
I *TOLD* YOU THAT IT WAS JUST A FIGHT BETWEEN SPOUSES!
!!

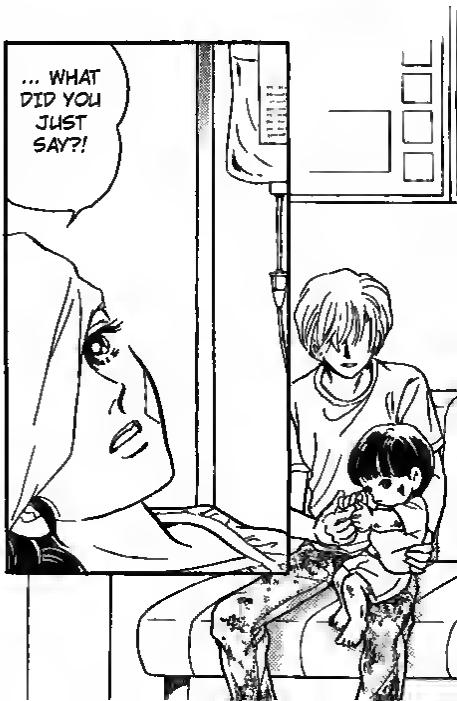
WHUMP
TOSHIYA ?!
THE PERSON WHO GOT INJURED... WAS YOU?!
TOSHIYA! GET OVER HERE!
SO WHAT'S IT TO YOU?!
WHAT'D YOU COME HERE FOR?!
DID YOU COME TO STICK YOUR NOSE IN MY BUSINESS AGAIN?!
……!
GRIP


APPARENTLY THE FATHER ISN'T RELATED TO THE BOY BY BLOOD...
PROTECTING TOSHIYA ...?
HE RETURNED TO THEIR APARTMENT AFTER HE WAS QUESTIONED BY THE POLICE...


Child Welfare Ser
MRS. H
APPARENTLY THE MOTHER GOT HIT BY HER DRUNK HUSBAND WHILE PROTECTING HER CHILD.
IT LOOKS LIKE SHE'LL NEED TO STAY AT THE HOSPITAL FOR THREE OR FOUR DAYS.


.....
GLANCE.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO TOSHIYA?


OR HE CAN BE TAKEN CARE OF AT A FACILITY... YOUR CHOICE.
UNTIL YOU'RE WELL ENOUGH TO LEAVE THE HOSPITAL, EITHER OUR FAMILY CAN TAKE HIM IN...
TOSHIYA CAN'T STAY HERE, AND IF YOU LET HIM GO HOME, ARE YOU SURE THAT MAN WILL BE ABLE TO PROPERLY TAKE CARE OF HIM?


... WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?!

I...
DON'T WORRY.
AT LEAST TOSHIYA SEEMS TO TAKE TO KOTA.
MIYA, YOU CAN PLAY NICELY WITH TOSHIYA, RIGHT?
STILL... IT'S THE SAME BOY THAT HIT MIYA, ISN'T IT?
YESH!
... AND THAT'S HOW YOU ENDED UP TAKING HIM HOME WITH YOU?
I HAD NO CHOICE, DID I? SHE DIDN'T HAVE ANY RELATIVES SHE COULD DEPEND ON.
♫ HEAA YOO AWW!
HEY, TOSHIYA! LOOK! MIYA WANTS TO PLAY!

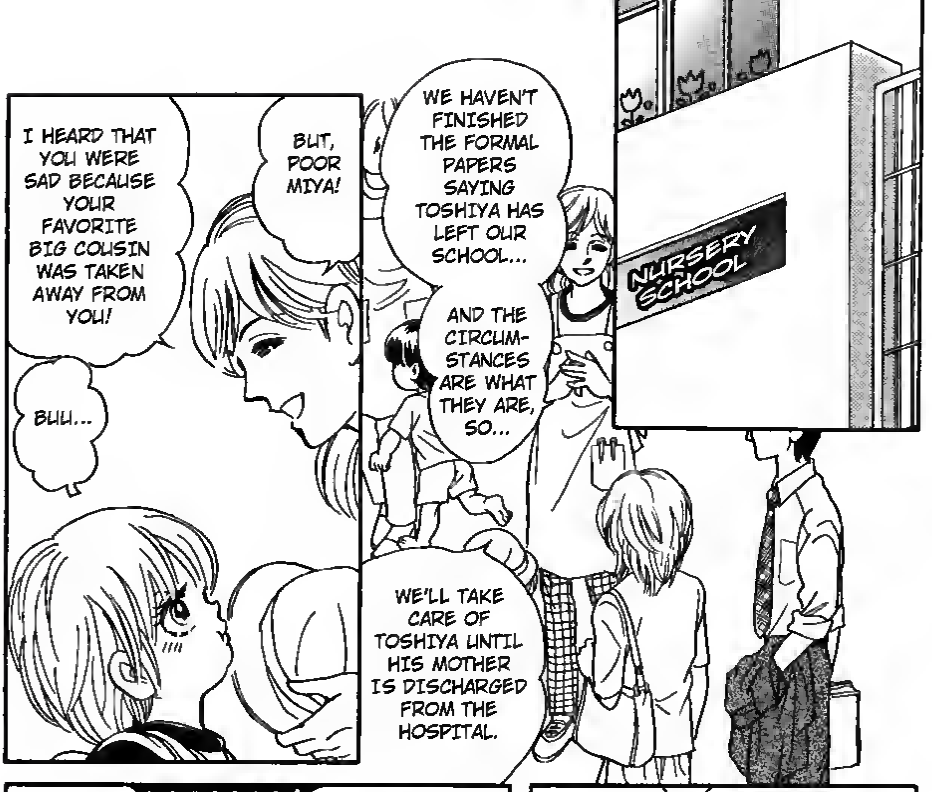
WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR BEAR'S NAME WAS AGAIN, MIYA?
MAWT'N!
GIGGLE!
HEEZA BEAA HOO KIN FWY ANN WEEWY AWBISHOO!
YANK
.....
AH...
TOSS
IT'S OKAY, TOSHIYA! COME AND HAVE SOME CAKE WITH MIYA!
AM I THAT SCARY...?
LOOK! IT'S JUICE...
UWAAAAAH!!!
HEY! DON'T YOU FEEL BAD FOR THE STUFFED ANIMAL IF YOU THROW HIM LIKE THAT?
ULP!

SQUISH
DID YOU GET JUICE ON YOU, TOSHIYA?
UHHH...
AH...
NO!
... I'LL GIVE YOU A PIECE OF MOMMY'S CAKE.
...WHA BOUT MIYA?
GOBBLE
GOBBLE
GOBBLE
DO YOU WANNA TAKE WONDER FOR A WALK, TOSHIYA?
STILL... HE'S PROBABLY ANXIOUS BEING IN SOME OTHER PERSON'S HOME, AND CONSIDERING WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM...
IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW LONG YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE BEING SO KIND.
THESE KINDS OF CHILDREN WILL GET OUT OF CONTROL ONCE THEY KNOW THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH WHATEVER THEY DO.
OH... YOU'VE COME HOME!

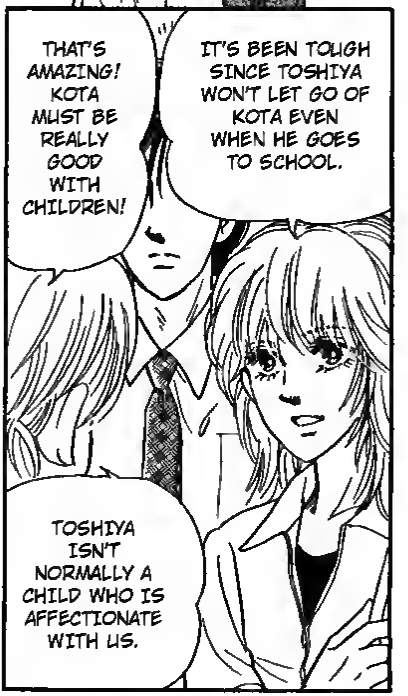
.....
DOGGY!
IT'S ALRIGHT! WONDER'S NOT SCARY!
WE'LL BE RIGHT BACK.
MIYA GO WIFF WONDA TOO!
MIYA, PLAY AT HOME WITH GRANNY, OKAY?
HEY MIYA, GRANNY BOUGHT YOU A PICTURE BOOK!
MIYA ...?
BUT I CAN'T BECAUSE OF TOSHIYAAA!!!
MIYA WANTED TO GO WITH KOTA, TOO!
SOB!
SOB!
SOB!
MI-... MIYA JUST SPOKE... "PEOPLE" LANGUAGE!
ER...
STUPID PARENT...
AT TWO YEARS OLD, MIYA FELT JEALOUSY AND DESPAIR FOR THE FIRST TIME.

PLEASE DON'T...
I ALREADY KIND OF REGRET IT.
GULP.
BECAUSE OF YOUR NEED TO PLEASE, MIYA IS THE BIGGEST VICTIM.
SIGH...
THIS IS NOT EASY...
IF YOU THINK OF ALL THE THINGS THAT BOY HAS DONE UP 'TIL NOW, YOU REALLY SHOULD'VE SCOLDED HIM.
WELL, YOU BROUGHT IT ON YOURSELF.
JUST DO YOUR BEST.
EXCEPT I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M BEING PULLED INTO ALL OF THIS.
I'M GONNA HEAD IN MYSELF. I HAD SOMETHING I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT, BUT THIS PROBABLY ISN'T THE BEST TIME.
OH, WELL. IT'S A GOOD LESSON, RIGHT?
IT'S BECAUSE MIYA'S SUCH A GOOD CHILD. YOU'VE COME THIS FAR WITHOUT REALLY HAVING TROUBLE RAISING A CHILD.

IT'S STRANGE HOW MUCH HE CARES FOR THAT LITTLE BOY, DON'T YOU THINK?
STILL, YOU KNOW... THAT KOTA...
TALK ABOUT WHAT?
DON'T TELL ME YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT AND NOT TALK ABOUT IT!
APCHU
HE REALLY CAN'T HELP SPENDING TIME WITH YOU, CAN HE?
HE EVEN TOOK A DAY OFF OF HIS PART-TIME JOB!
GOOD NIGHT!
NOW WHAT DID YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT?
KOTA WAS ALSO VERY LONELY AS A KID, SO HE PROBABLY FEELS STRONGLY FOR HIM...
YOU MIGHT HAVE A SPECIAL TALENT WITH TAKING CARE OF KIDS.
WHAT ?
I THOUGHT THIS WHEN I WAS CARRYING MIYA ON MY BACK WHILE SHOPPING TODAY...


I HEARD THAT YOU WERE SAD BECAUSE YOUR FAVORITE BIG COUSIN WAS TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU!
BUT, POOR MIYA!
BUU...
WE HAVEN'T FINISHED THE FORMAL PAPERS SAYING TOSHIYA HAS LEFT OUR SCHOOL...
AND THE CIRCUM-STANCES ARE WHAT THEY ARE, SO...
NURSERY SCHOOL
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF TOSHIYA UNTIL HIS MOTHER IS DISCHARGED FROM THE HOSPITAL.

WHY DON'T YOU ASK HIM ABOUT IT?
HA HA!
WHEN HE GRADUATES FROM HIGH SCHOOL NEXT SPRING, WE'LL DEFINITELY RECRUIT HIM INTO OUR NURSERY CENTRE!
!


THAT'S AMAZING! KOTA MUST BE REALLY GOOD WITH CHILDREN!
IT'S BEEN TOUGH SINCE TOSHIYA WON'T LET GO OF KOTA EVEN WHEN HE GOES TO SCHOOL.
TOSHIYA ISN'T NORMALLY A CHILD WHO IS AFFECTIONATE WITH US.

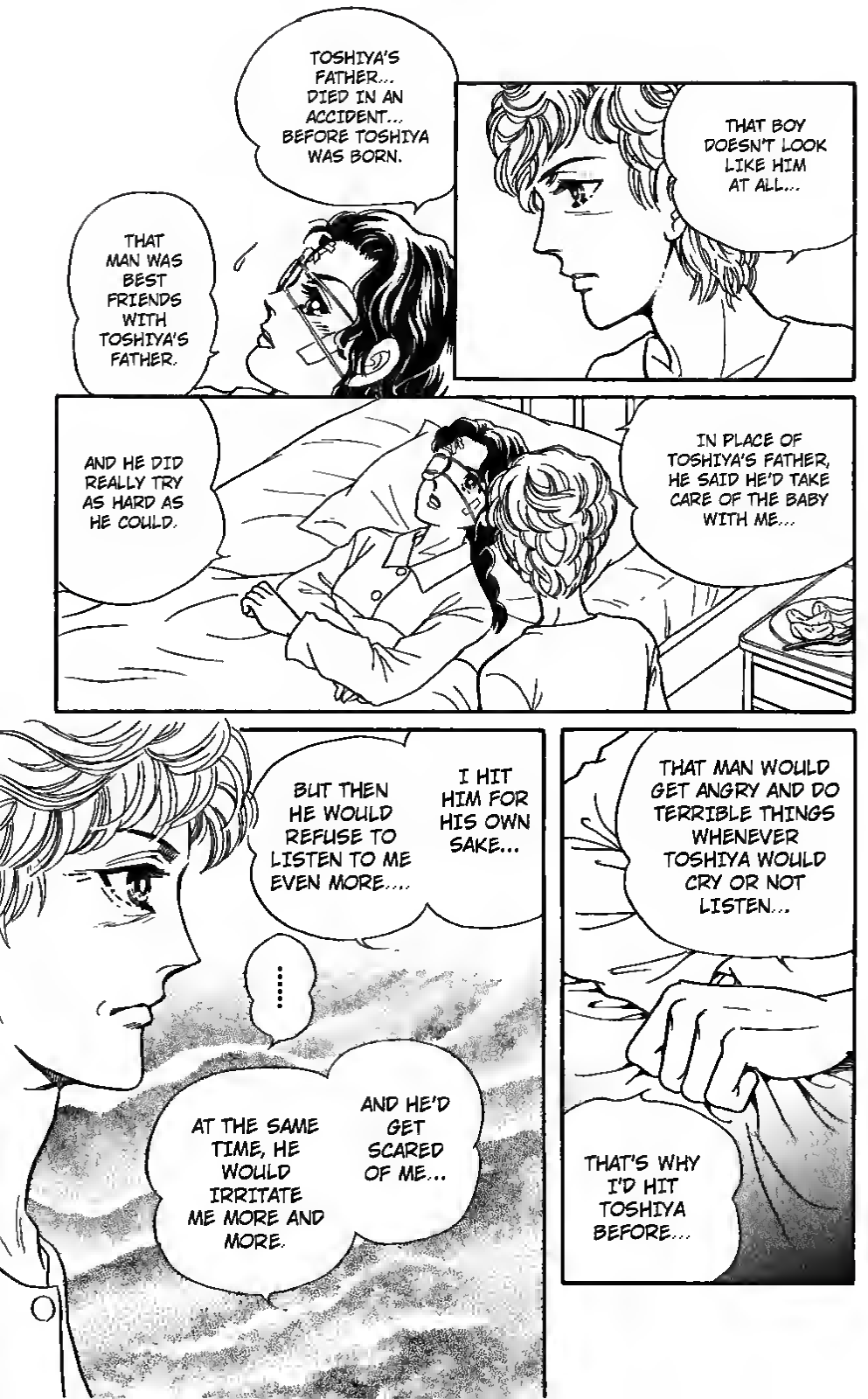
ARE!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO THE NURSERY SCHOOL, I'LL GO WITH YOU.
NO MATTER HOW SMART A DOG MIGHT BE, IT MUST STILL BE TOUGH TO TAKE A LITTLE CHILD HOME WITH JUST YOU TWO.
WELL, WE'LL LEAVE IT THERE, THEN. THANKS!
CERTAINLY. 'TIL NEXT TIME!
?
AH, KOTA. YOU'RE HOME!
KAORI'S MOTHER AND... OUR LANDLORD?
YEA...
HELLO THERE.

SURE, IF THE OWNER'S AT HOME. BUT WHAT IF THERE'S NOBODY THERE?
I JUST THOUGHT IT'D BE GOOD TO BRING A CHANGE OF CLOTHING FOR TOSHIYA IF WE CAN.
WE'LL JUST DROP BY BEFORE GOING TO THE NURSERY SCHOOL.
WE'RE GOING TO THAT BOY'S APARTMENT?
PANT!
PANT!
DING DONG!
ピンポーン
YAMANAKA COOPERATIVE
WELL, IN THAT CASE, WE'LL JUST ASK A NEIGHBOR AND SEE IF WE CAN BORROW THE SUPER-INTENDENT'S KEY...
WELL, LOOKS LIKE WE DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT ANYMORE.
.....
WHO ARE YOU?
カチャ

SHUT UP!
WE MADE SURE TO TALK WITH THE MOTHER ABOUT TAKING CARE OF HIM UNTIL SHE GETS DISCHARGED.
YOU DON'T JUST BARGE INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS!
THE KID'S CLOTHES ?
HIC!
ARGH! ARE YOU THE ONES WHO TOOK AWAY THE BRAT SOMEWHERE?!
!
SWOOP!
WE'RE NOT HERE TO FIGHT...
NOW NOW!
YOU HEARD ME! THE MAN OF THE HOUSE DOESN'T EVEN WORK AND DRINKS DURING THE DAY!
WHY, YOU!!
WHAT'D YOU SAY, YOU OLD HAG!
WHAT ARE YOU GETTING ALL WORKED UP ABOUT? YOU'RE JUST A SAD LITTLE MAN WHO ABUSES HIS WIFE AND KIDS AND FOOLS AROUND ALL DAY.

UH...
MAY WE COME IN?
WE'RE JUST HERE TO TAKE A CHANGE OF CLOTHES FOR TOSHIYA...
HE'S HUGE.
GRRRRRR!
.....
GRUFF!
GRRR...
WONDER, NO!
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT!
EVEN IF I WANT TO WORK, I DON'T HAVE A JOB!
MY COMPANY WENT BANK-RUPT!
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR JOB?
IT'S NOT LIKE I'M LOAFIN' AROUND 'CAUSE I WANT TO, Y'KNOW?!

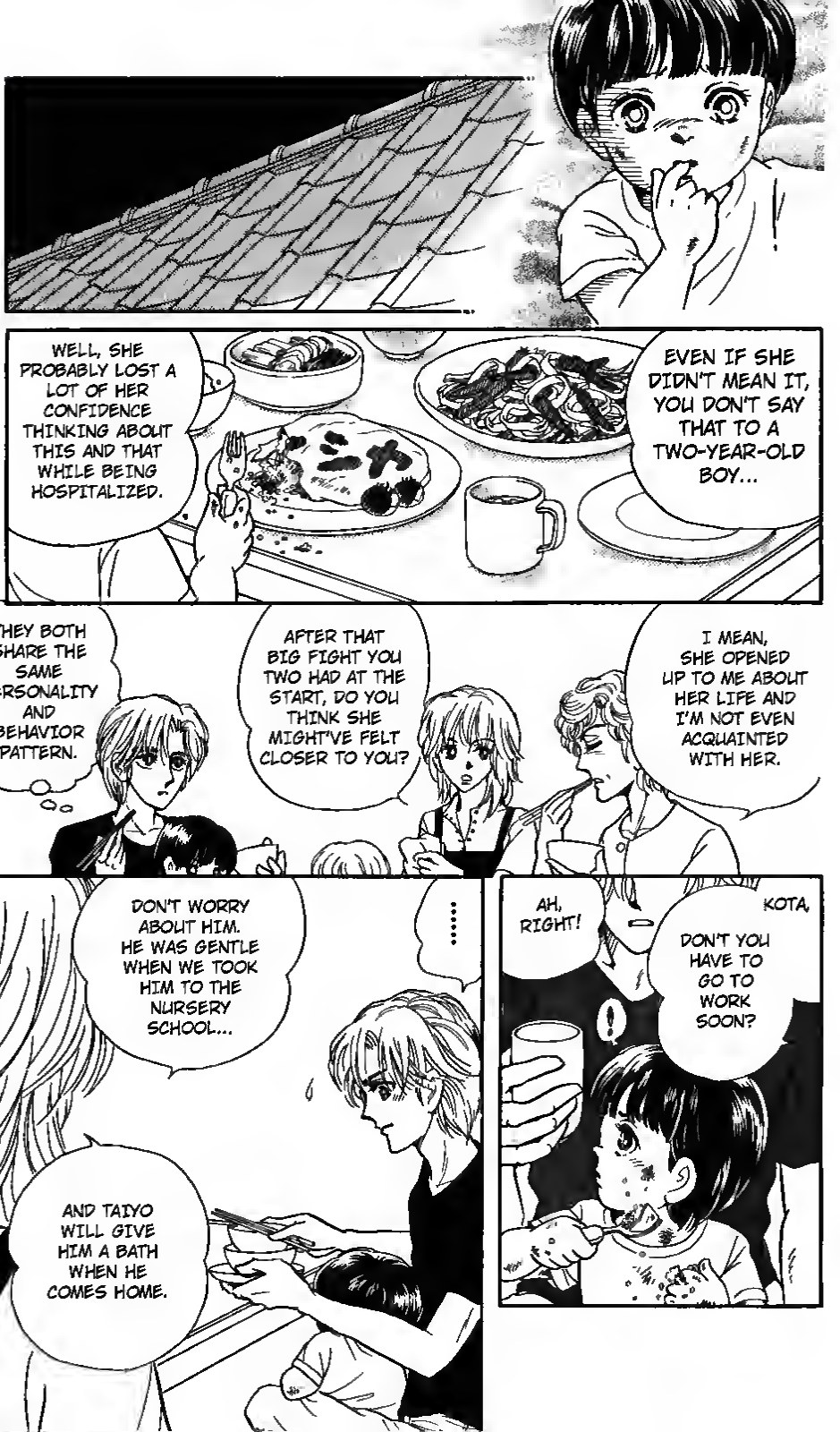
HE BORROWED A TRUCK... AND WORKED AT A MOVING COMPANY.
HE SAID HE'D BUY HIS OWN TRUCK ONE DAY AND MAKE LOTS OF MONEY RUNNING A LONG-DISTANCE SERVICE...
HOSPIT
AFTER HIS WORK-PLACE WENT UNDER...
HE WASN'T ABLE TO FIND A NEW JOB POSITION...
THE MONEY I WAS BRINGING IN WASN'T ENOUGH...
AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER MY PART-TIME SALARY WOULD MEET THE COSTS OF TAKING CARE OF TOSHIYA.
THE SAVINGS WE HAD FOR THE TRUCK WAS GRADUALLY USED UP...
AND THEN HE JUST FELL INTO DESPAIR.
AS FOR MYSELF...
I'D LIKE TO WORK NIGHTS, BUT I CAN'T JUST LEAVE TOSHIYA WITH HIM WHEN HE'S LIKE THAT...


TOSHIYA'S FATHER... DIED IN AN ACCIDENT... BEFORE TOSHIYA WAS BORN.
THAT BOY DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HIM AT ALL...
THAT MAN WAS BEST FRIENDS WITH TOSHIYA'S FATHER.
AND HE DID REALLY TRY AS HARD AS HE COULD.
IN PLACE OF TOSHIYA'S FATHER, HE SAID HE'D TAKE CARE OF THE BABY WITH ME...
I HIT HIM FOR HIS OWN SAKE...
BUT THEN HE WOULD REFUSE TO LISTEN TO ME EVEN MORE....
.....
AND HE'D GET SCARED OF ME...
AT THE SAME TIME, HE WOULD IRRITATE ME MORE AND MORE.
THAT MAN WOULD GET ANGRY AND DO TERRIBLE THINGS WHENEVER TOSHIYA WOULD CRY OR NOT LISTEN...
THAT'S WHY I'D HIT TOSHIYA BEFORE...

THAT NIGHT... WAS A SHOCK...
SEEING TOSHIYA'S FACE, SO SAFE AND LOVED...
WITH A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT HE ONLY SAW RARELY AT THE NURSERY SCHOOL.
THESE DAYS, HE NEVER SHOWS ME THAT FACE...
EVEN THOUGH I'M HIS MOTHER ...
I FELT SO ANGRY AT MYSELF.
I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.
I OFTEN HIT MY DAUGHTER FOR ANGERING ME LIKE THAT.
MY DAUGHTER HOLDS A GRUDGE AGAINST ME FOR THAT EVEN NOW.
CHILDREN DON'T CARE ABOUT THE PAINS THAT THEIR STRUGGLING PARENTS GO THROUGH...
TSK.
SO THAT'S HOW SHE BECAME SUCH A TOUGH PERSON.
THAT'S RIGHT.
AND SHE DOESN'T FEEL EVEN AN OUNCE OF GRATITUDE FOR HOW I RAISED HER!

I MAY HAVE ALREADY LOST TOSHIYA...
I...
UNTIL SHE GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL. BUT LET ME TELL YOU, IT WASN'T EASY.
BUT... YOU TWO CONTINUED TO LIVE TOGETHER, DIDN'T YOU?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I SHOULD DO FROM NOW ON...
I'M NOT... QUALIFIED TO BE A PARENT...
AND I THOUGHT THAT OUR FAMILY COULD RETURN TO NORMAL AS LONG AS WE FOUND A JOB...
BUT IT'S HOPELESS!
SHH... WE NEED TO BE QUIET IN THE HOSPITAL.
GRAMMY ISH WHEA?

AH...
THE KIDS DIDN'T WANT TO WAIT ANYMORE, SO...
TOSHIYA
DO YOU LIKE KOTA?
.....
FINE! WHY DON'T YOU JUST STAY WITH HIM FOREVER?!
DON'T COME BACK HOME!


WELL, SHE PROBABLY LOST A LOT OF HER CONFIDENCE THINKING ABOUT THIS AND THAT WHILE BEING HOSPITALIZED.
EVEN IF SHE DIDN'T MEAN IT, YOU DON'T SAY THAT TO A TWO-YEAR-OLD BOY...
THEY BOTH SHARE THE SAME PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOR PATTERN.
AFTER THAT BIG FIGHT YOU TWO HAD AT THE START, DO YOU THINK SHE MIGHT'VE FELT CLOSER TO YOU?
I MEAN, SHE OPENED UP TO ME ABOUT HER LIFE AND I'M NOT EVEN ACQUAINTED WITH HER.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT HIM. HE WAS GENTLE WHEN WE TOOK HIM TO THE NURSERY SCHOOL...
.....
AND TAIYO WILL GIVE HIM A BATH WHEN HE COMES HOME.
AH, RIGHT!
KOTA,
DON'T YOU HAVE TO GO TO WORK SOON?

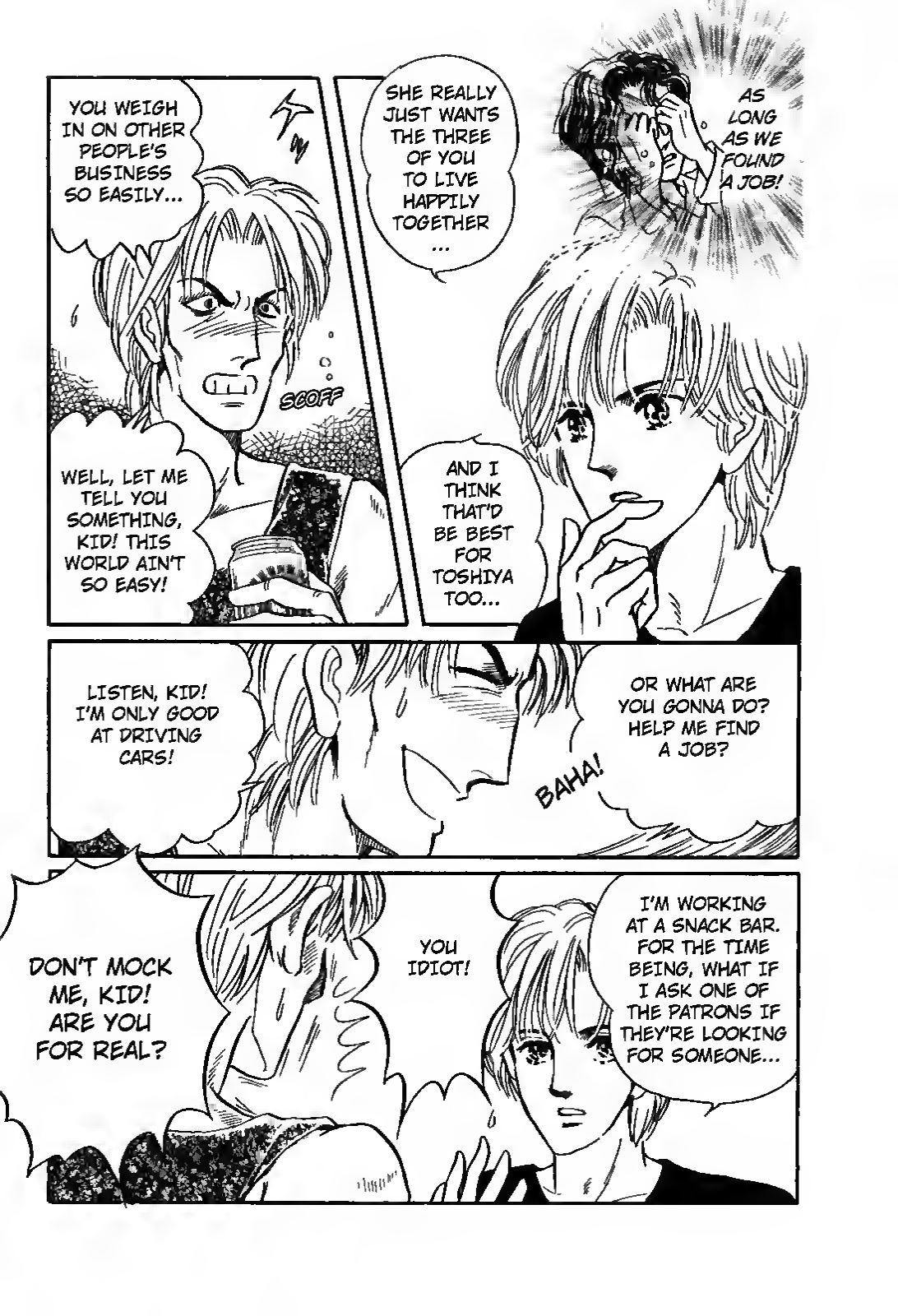
G'NITE, WONDER!
ARF!
SEE YOU!
BYE, KOTAAA!
WHINE?

!
AGGGHHH!!
BLOOD!
NO!
WONDER ?!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, TOSHIYA ?!
STOP IT!
ヒュン!
STAB...
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?!
WHAT DID WONDER EVER DO TO YOU?!

KAORI?
OH... TAIYO, YOU'RE HOME.
!
AND HERE'S MR. DUCKY!
HAHAHA!
RUSHH
GIGGLE!
SORRY THAT YOU HAD TO GET HURT LIKE THIS.
WHAT A GOOD BOY YOU ARE, WONDER...
EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE BADLY TREATED, YOU DIDN'T BITE BACK.

UNTIL NOW... EVEN WHEN I SCOLDED MIYA, I NEVER LAID A HAND ON HER.
I THOUGHT I COULD CONTROL MYSELF... SO WHY AM I FEELING THIS WAY?
WITHOUT THINKING... I WANTED TO HIT HIM.
ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS?
HOW PERFECT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
.....
アイ

WAIT! ARE YOU RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME AGAIN?!
BUT ISN'T YOUR PLACE THE OTHER WAY?
COMING BACK FROM WORK.
EEEK!
NO! I'M JUST GOING TO TALK TO SOMEONE.
HEY! IT'S HINAMI!
WHERE YOU GOIN'?
WE'VE ALREADY CHILLED AT THE ARCADE AND AT THE STORE, SO...
BESIDES, THE PERSON YOU'RE MEETING MIGHT BE SOME GIRL!
GATHER
WE'VE GOT NOTHING BETTER TO DO.
GATHER
GATHER
WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?
NO, I'M HERE TO TELL YOU WHAT'S GOING ON.
THAT'S A MAN?
YOU HERE TO FIGHT THIS TIME?!

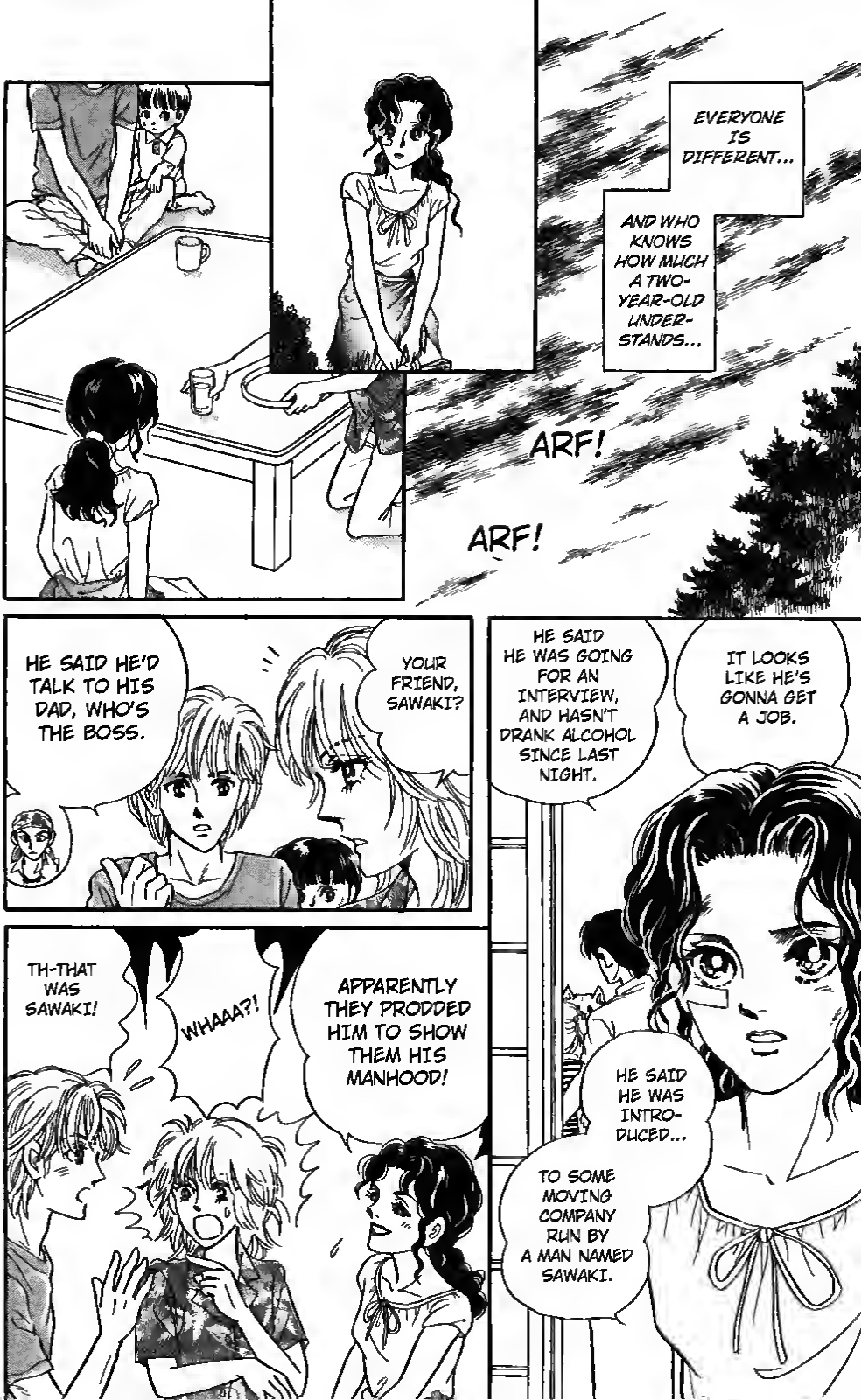

AS LONG AS WE FOUND A JOB!
SHE REALLY JUST WANTS THE THREE OF YOU TO LIVE HAPPILY TOGETHER ...
YOU WEIGH IN ON OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS SO EASILY...
SCOFF
AND I THINK THAT'D BE BEST FOR TOSHIYA TOO...
WELL, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, KID! THIS WORLD AIN'T SO EASY!
LISTEN, KID! I'M ONLY GOOD AT DRIVING CARS!
BAHA!
OR WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO? HELP ME FIND A JOB?
DON'T MOCK ME, KID! ARE YOU FOR REAL?
YOU IDIOT!
I'M WORKING AT A SNACK BAR. FOR THE TIME BEING, WHAT IF I ASK ONE OF THE PATRONS IF THEY'RE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE...

IF YOU'RE NOT INVOLVED, THEN STAY OUT OF THIS!
I DON'T KNOW THAT'S GOING ON, BUT HINAMI'S JUST SAYING THESE THINGS TO HELP!
THINKS HE'S ALL THAT!
THIS DUDE'S ATTITUDE IS PISSING ME OFF!
DO YOU WANT ME TO GIVE YOU A BLACK EYE?
I'M GETTING REAL TIRED OF YOU...
GRIP
HEY! WHO ARE YOU SHOOTING YOUR MOUTH OFF AT, HUH?
NO! NO! I WAS ONLY BROUGHT IN FOR QUEST-IONING!
LET'S SHAKE HANDS!
DUDE... WE HAD NO IDEA YOU CAME BACK FROM THE SLAMMER!
CRAZY! SO YOU'VE DONE TIME?!
WELL, AREN'T YOU A TOUGH GUY?! THE COPS ARRESTED ME TWO, THREE DAYS AGO SO I'VE JUST ABOUT HAD IT!
CARS AND JOB SEARCHES AND ALL...
SO WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?
GASP! SO YOU'RE NOT JUST A DRUNK!

GET UP
DID YOU WAKE UP?

SURPRISE
LICK
DID YOU SAY SORRY TO WONDER?
.....
WONDER'S TRYING TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH YOU.
WONDER AND MIYA BOTH TRIED TO BE YOUR FRIEND FROM THE VERY START, YOU KNOW?
JUST LIKE HOW I TRIED TO BECOME FRIENDS WITH YOU...
AND MIYA'S DADDY AND MOMMY AND GRANNY.
AS DO THE PEOPLE AT THE NURSERY SCHOOL...
EVERYONE CARES ABOUT YOU AND WORRIES ABOUT YOU, TOSHIYA.
BUT THE PERSON THAT LOVES YOU THE MOST IS NEITHER ME NOR ANYONE ELSE...

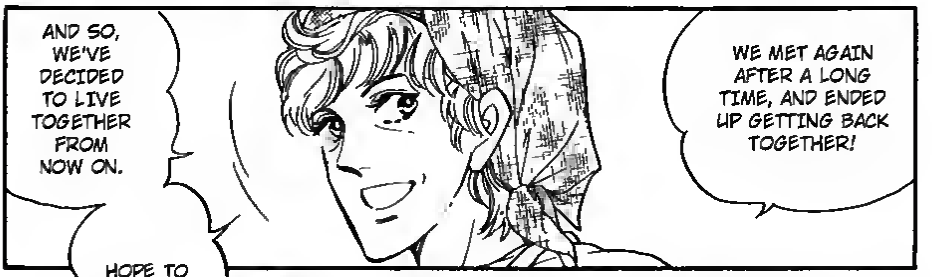
.....
THE TRUTH IS, YOUR MOM REALLY LIKES YOU...
AND SHE WANTS TO BE WITH YOU ALWAYS.
TOSHIYA, THE PERSON THAT LOVES AND CARES ABOUT YOU THE MOST IS...
YOUR MOM.
THE PERSON THAT LOVES YOU THE MOST... IS YOUR MOM.
YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT, TOSHIYA?

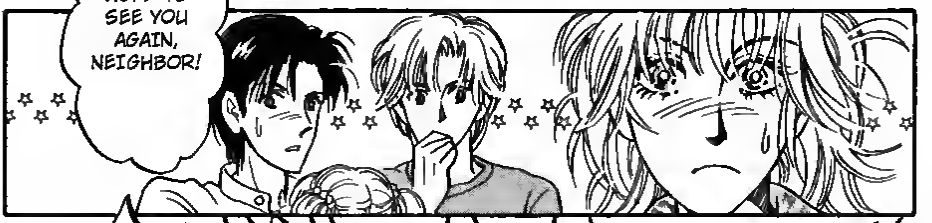

EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT...
AND WHO KNOWS HOW MUCH A TWO-YEAR-OLD UNDER-STANDS...
ARF!
ARF!
IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S GONNA GET A JOB.
HE SAID HE WAS GOING FOR AN INTERVIEW, AND HASN'T DRANK ALCOHOL SINCE LAST NIGHT.
HE SAID HE WAS INTRO-DUCED...
TO SOME MOVING COMPANY RUN BY A MAN NAMED SAWAKI.
YOUR FRIEND, SAWAKI?
HE SAID HE'D TALK TO HIS DAD, WHO'S THE BOSS.
APPARENTLY THEY PRODDED HIM TO SHOW THEM HIS MANHOOD!
WHAAA?!
TH-THAT WAS SAWAKI!

LET'S GO HOME, TOSHI-YA!
PERHAPS...
KOTA HAS A STRANGE GIFT VERY MUCH LIKE WONDER'S...
A GIFT OF COMMUNICATING FEELINGS, AND UNDERSTANDING THE HEART OF A CHILD.

THAT REMINDS ME, THE LANDLORD MENTIONED THAT SOMEONE WAS MOVING INTO THE VACANT HOUSE NEXT DOOR.
A MOVE? THIS LATE IN THE EVE-NING?
VROOM...
I CLEANED THE HOUSE SO THAT IT CAN BE USED RIGHT AWAY!
SORRY. I CAME AFTER WORK WAS FINISHED, AND I RAN LATE.
SLAM!
HEY! HERE! OVER HERE!
EXCUSE ME?
MY, YOU'RE ALL GROWN UP NOW, AREN'T YOU?
KAORI, IS IT?
?
HUH?

WHAT?!
IT WAS QUITE DISGRACEFUL OF ME...
LONG TIME AGO, I FELT SOME THINGS TOWARD YOU THAT I'M ASHAMED OF...
HEH HEH...
DON'T YOU REMEMBER? IT'S YOUR SECOND DAD!!


AND SO, WE'VE DECIDED TO LIVE TOGETHER FROM NOW ON.
WE MET AGAIN AFTER A LONG TIME, AND ENDED UP GETTING BACK TOGETHER!


HOPE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, NEIGHBOR!

WHAAAT?!!
END OF CHAPTER 8

WONDER!

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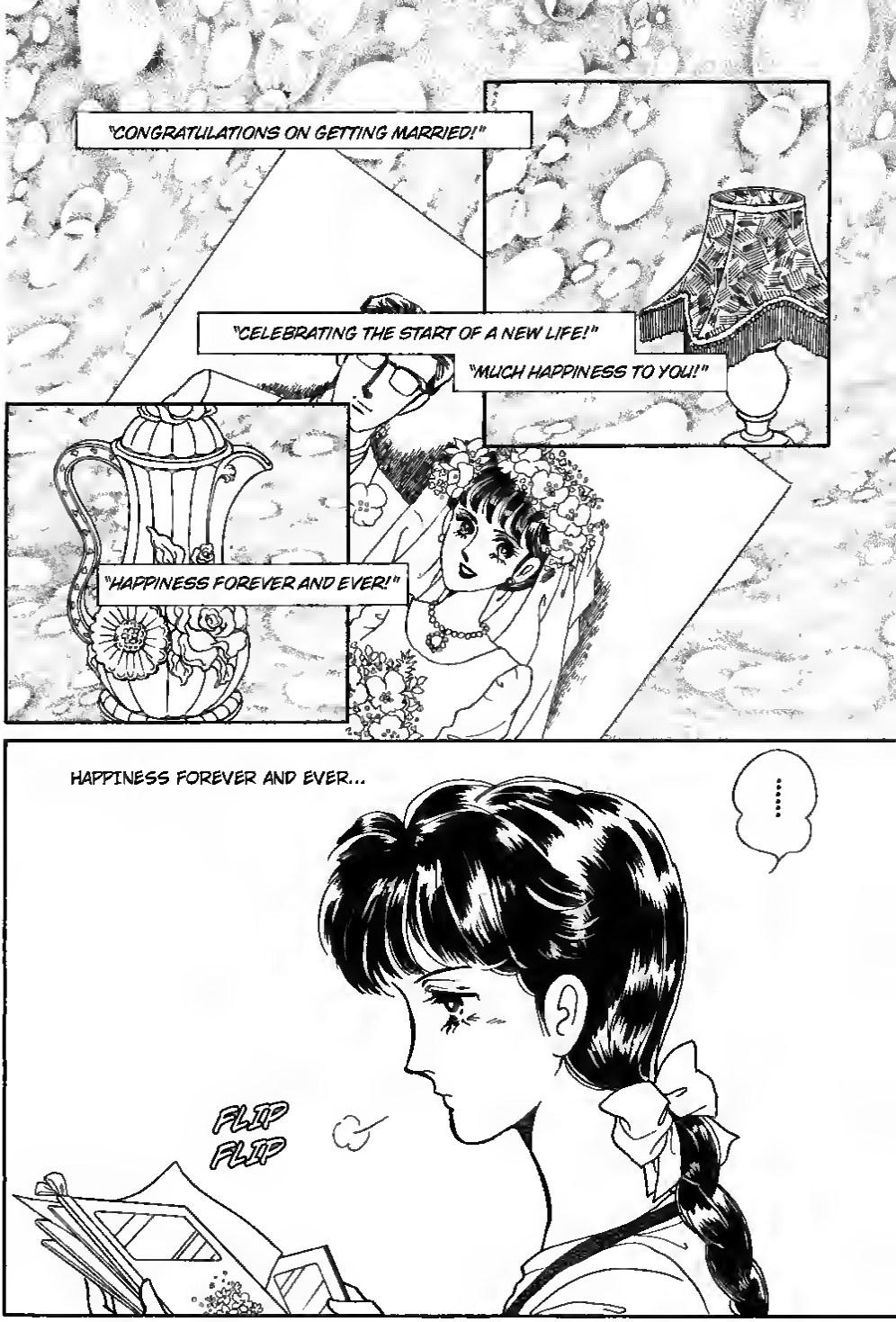
TOGETHER


"CONGRATULATIONS ON GETTING MARRIED!"
"CELEBRATING THE START OF A NEW LIFE!"
"MUCH HAPPINESS TO YOU!"
"HAPPINESS FOREVER AND EVER!"
HAPPINESS FOREVER AND EVER...
.....
FLIP
FLIP

WELCOME HOME!
PHEW! I'M EXHAUSTED!
KNOCK
コンコン!
KNOCK
!
... HEY! WHAT'S WITH THE MESS?
I'M STARVING, TOO!
I HAVE THINGS TO DO DURING THE DAY.
C'MON... DO THAT DURING THE DAY, PLEASE.
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
A FRIEND SENT ME PICTURES FROM THE WEDDING, SO I THOUGHT I'D ORGANIZE THEM...
THIS APARTMENT IS ALREADY CRAMPED AS IT IS.

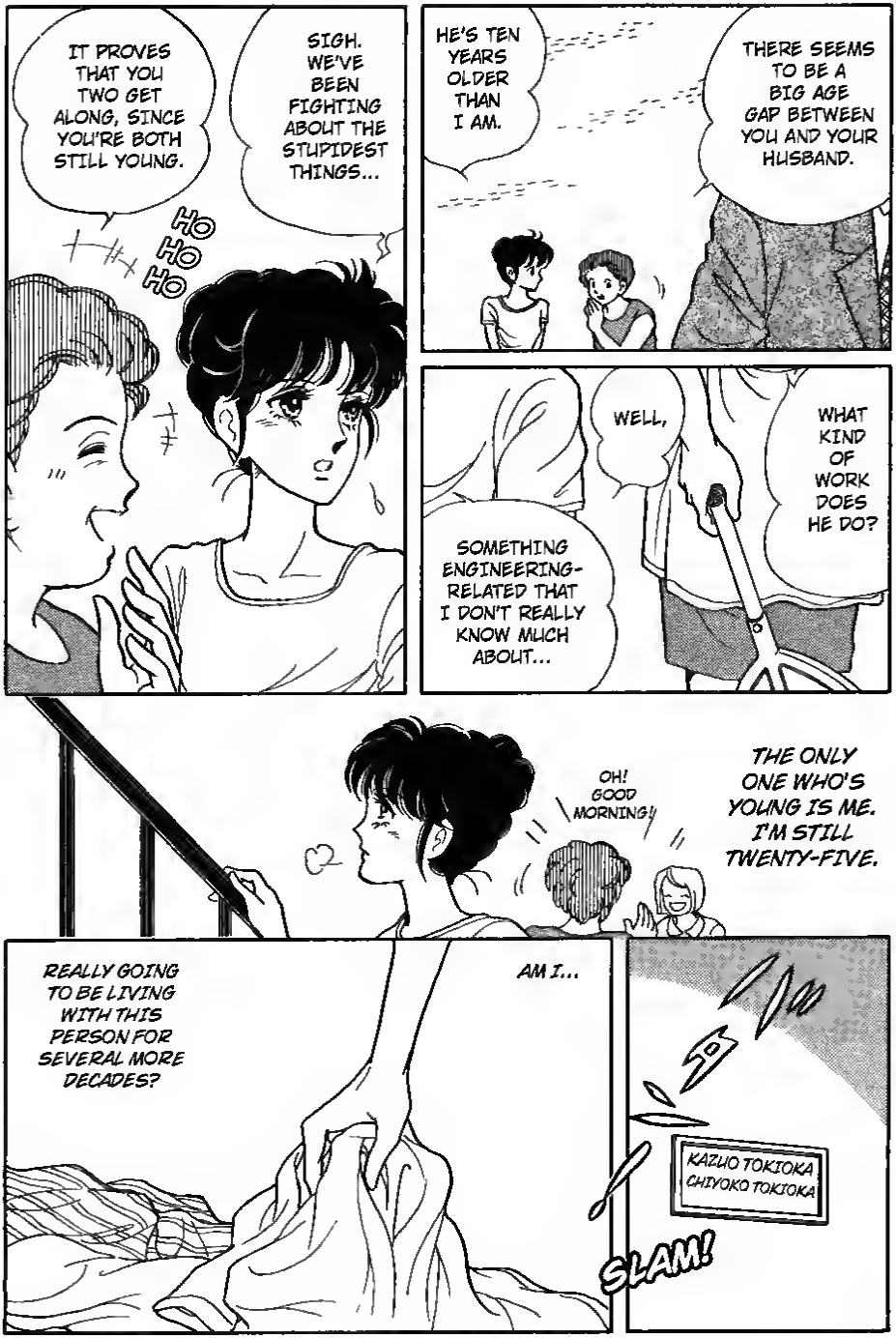
GROAN. NOT AGAIN...
WHAT?
DON'T PEOPLE USUALLY CUT THE EGGPLANT IN MISO SOUP ROUNDLY?
GRUMBLE
THE TASTE DOESN'T CHANGE BASED ON HOW YOU CUT IT.
WELL, IT WAS DONE THIS WAY AT OUR HOUSE...
REALLY, NOW?
I CAN'T SAY THE SAME FOR THESE CUCUMBERS ...
HEY!
IF YOU DON'T THINK IT TASTES GOOD, THEN JUST SAY SO!
THUD!
THAT'S...
NOT WHAT I SAID...
CHUP!
WELL, IF WE'RE GONNA COMPLAIN, I HAVE A MOUNTAINS WORTH OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT YOU, YOU KNOW?!
IF YOU LIKE ROUND CUTS SO MUCH, I'LL JUST CUT YOUR WATERMELONS THAT WAY, TOO.

YOU GRUMBLE ABOUT HOW THE HOUSE ISN'T CLEAN...
FIRST OFF, STOP SLURPING UP YOUR FOOD SO LOUDLY AS IF YOU'RE SOME MIDDLE-AGED MAN...
AND YET, YOU ALWAYS LOAF AROUND ON HOLIDAYS!
WELL, I AM A MIDDLE-AGED MAN...
YOU HAVE COMPLAINTS?
I'M GETTING TO IT!
GULP
IT'S LIKE I'M LIVING WITH MY NAGGING FATHER!
AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR YOUR TWO CENTS ABOUT HOW TO PROPERLY HANG DRY THE LAUNDRY!
AND THAT BRINGS ME TO WHAT I HATE THE MOST!
THIS APARTMENT!
IF YOU KEEP SPEAKING SO LOUDLY, THE OTHER ROOMS ARE GONNA HEAR YOU...

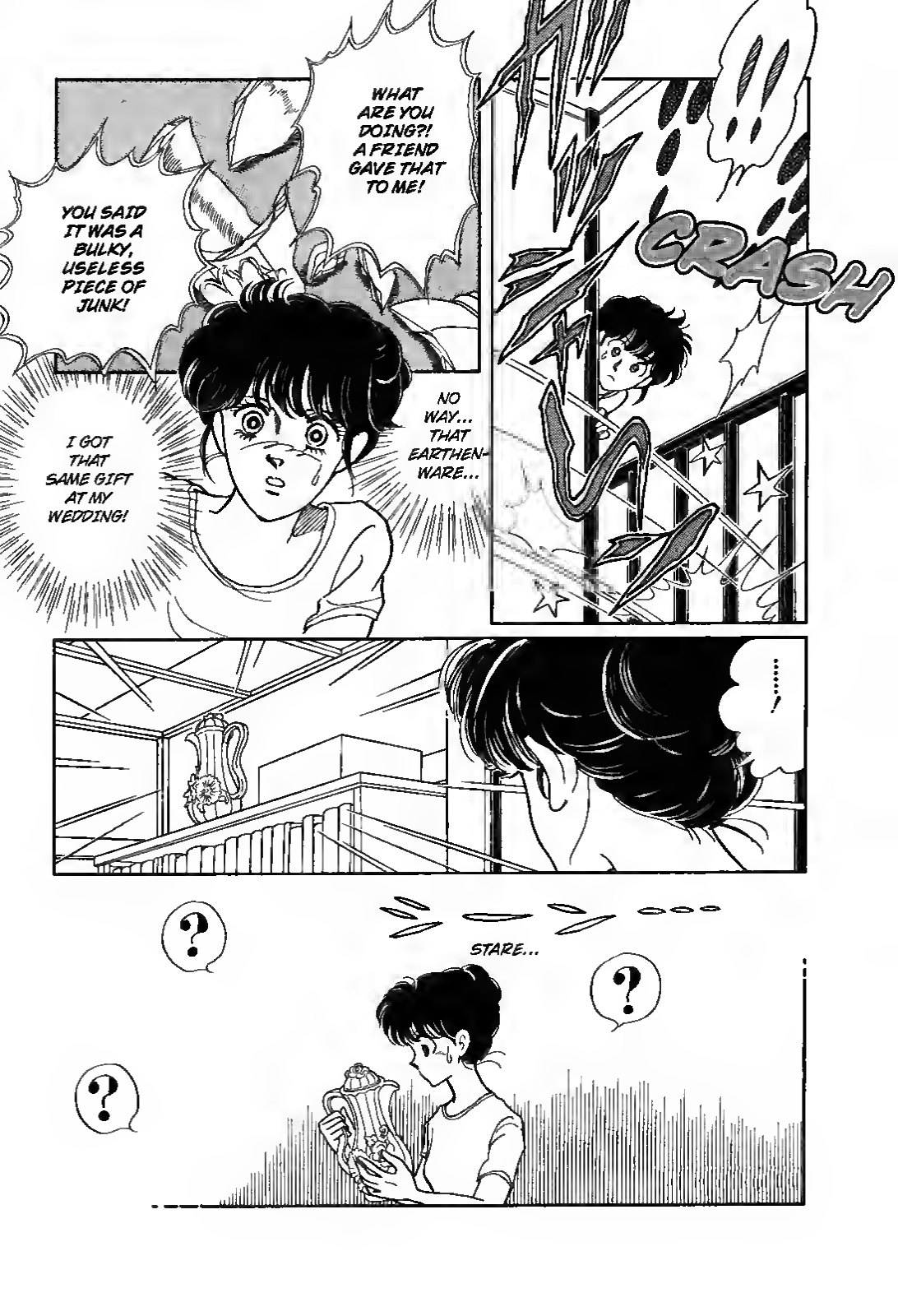
WELL, FORGIVE ME FOR ONLY BRINGING IN ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE IN THIS GRUNGY APARTMENT.
AND YET, THEY'RE LIVING IN A PROPER CONDOMINIUM!
MY FRIEND MARRIED A GUY WHO WAS MUCH YOUNGER THAN YOU...
OUTGOING PROBLEMS
IT WAS A HASTY DECISION! TOO HASTY!
BUT YOU ALREADY KNEW THAT WHEN WE GOT MARRIED, DIDN'T YOU?!
ALL MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY WERE TOTALLY AGAINST THIS... AND YET I STILL ENDED UP CHOOSING YOU...
YOU'RE THIRTY-FIVE, AND SO OBSESSED WITH YOUR RESEARCH THAT YOU DON'T EVEN CARE FOR THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU.
カチン!
GRR!
ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER ASKED THEM ANYWAY!
IT'S A SMALL SPACE. IT'S NOT LIKE YOU HAVE A CHOICE, DO YOU?
GO OVER THERE! DON'T SLEEP BESIDE ME!

HEY...
HMM?
DID YOU HEAR THAT? IT'S COMING FROM NEXT DOOR.
!!!!
!
CLINK...
RATTLE...
NO ONE LIVES NEXT DOOR.
STILL, THERE WAS A SOUND...
MASS TRANSFER
IT'S PROBABLY COMING FROM ANOTHER APARTMENT.
I HEARD IT COMING FROM THIS SIDE!
OR A MOUSE ..
YOU IMAGINED IT.
HEY! DON'T JUST GO TO SLEEP!
YAWN
SMACK

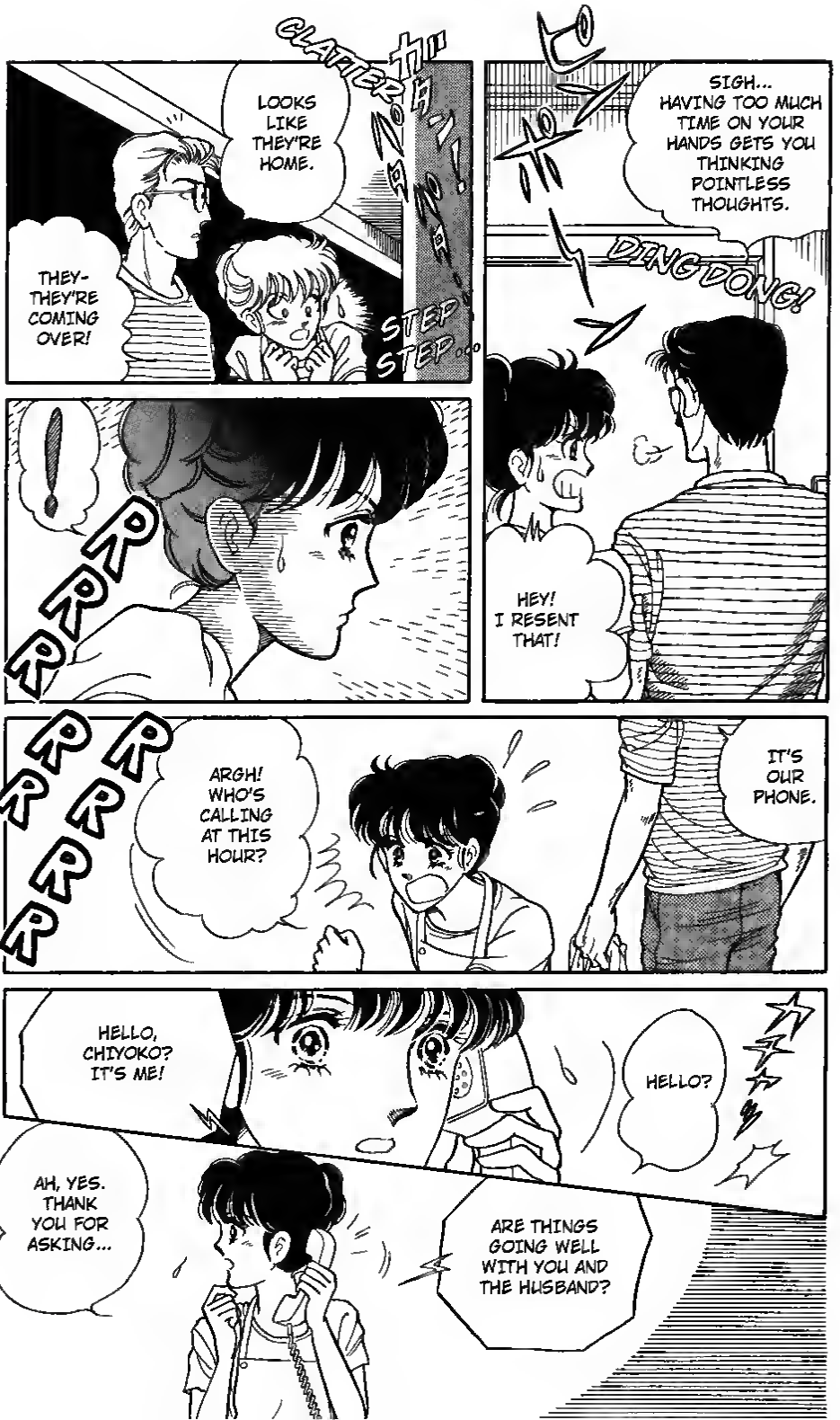
I WAS CONVINCED SOMETHING *ELSE* WAS GOING ON IN THERE!
WHAT? IT DIDN'T SEEM LIKE THAT AT ALL!
HO HO HO
NOW NOW, DON'T START SPREADING STRANGE RUMORS!
REALLY?! SO SOMEONE REALLY DID MOVE IN NEXT DOOR?
YES, AN OLD COUPLE!
SO IT TURNS OUT THERE *IS* SOMEONE NEXT TO US!
HMM.. YOU SHOULD GO AND GREET THEM.
GOOD MORNING!
I'M OFF TO WORK NOW!
ISN'T IT COMMON FOR THE PERSON WHO MOVED IN TO GREET FIRST?
OH, LEAVING FOR WORK?


IT PROVES THAT YOU TWO GET ALONG, SINCE YOU'RE BOTH STILL YOUNG.
SIGH. WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING ABOUT THE STUPIDEST THINGS...
HO HO HO
HE'S TEN YEARS OLDER THAN I AM.
THERE SEEMS TO BE A BIG AGE GAP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND.
WELL,
WHAT KIND OF WORK DOES HE DO?
SOMETHING ENGINEERING-RELATED THAT I DON'T REALLY KNOW MUCH ABOUT...
OH! GOOD MORNING!
THE ONLY ONE WHO'S YOUNG IS ME. I'M STILL TWENTY-FIVE.
REALLY GOING TO BE LIVING WITH THIS PERSON FOR SEVERAL MORE DECADES?
AM I...
KAZUO TOKIOKA
CHIYOKO TOKIOKA
SLAM!

びくっ
FLINCH
ガラガラ
COLLAPSE
NEXT DOOR?
OH, REALLY? THAT'D BE A HUGE RELIEF FOR ME!
IF YOU KEEP COMPLAINING LIKE THIS, WE'RE THROUGH!
ガラ…
SLIDE...
HUH?
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO EVEN MARRY YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE!
SHE DID SAY THE PEOPLE NEXT DOOR WERE AN OLD COUPLE, RIGHT?
……


WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! A FRIEND GAVE THAT TO ME!
YOU SAID IT WAS A BULKY, USELESS PIECE OF JUNK!
I GOT THAT SAME GIFT AT MY WEDDING!
NO WAY... THAT EARTHEN-WARE...
CRASH
.....!
STARE...
?
?
?

MAYBE THEY CLEANED THE MESS RIGHT AWAY?
SO THEN, WHEN I TOOK A PEEK NEXT DOOR, THE VERANDA WAS EMPTY!!
NO WAY!! I DIDN'T HEAR ANYONE CLEANING ANYTHING!
SO WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME TO GO AND GREET THEM?
CUP NOO-DLES ?
YOU'RE OLDER AND WISER, SO GO AND GET A GOOD LOOK!
NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I PEEKED OVER THE VERANDA, THERE WAS NOBODY IN THERE!
THEN ALL OF A SUDDEN, THERE WASN'T A SOUND OR SIGN OF ANYONE THERE!
WELL, DON'T YOU THINK IT'S A LITTLE ODD?!
I HAVE TO CHECK OR ELSE IT'LL KEEP ME UP ALL NIGHT!!
DON'T GO PEEKING INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S HOMES.
IT'S CREEPY.


CLATTER
カラ
LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE HOME.
THEY-THEY'RE COMING OVER!
STEP STEP...
SIGH... HAVING TOO MUCH TIME ON YOUR HANDS GETS YOU THINKING POINTLESS THOUGHTS.
DING DONG!
HEY! I RESENT THAT!
!
ARGH! WHO'S CALLING AT THIS HOUR?
IT'S OUR PHONE.
HELLO?
HELLO, CHIYOKO? IT'S ME!
AH, YES. THANK YOU FOR ASKING...
ARE THINGS GOING WELL WITH YOU AND THE HUSBAND?

THERE WASN'T ANOTHER COUPLE LIKE US IN THERE?
SO...? HOW WAS THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR?
I HAVE NO IDEA. THE DOOR INSIDE WAS SHUT.
THEY WERE NICE, NORMAL PEOPLE.
SO WHO CALLED?
SLAM!
バタン!
IT WAS A FRIEND.
THE PEOPLE FIGHTING EARLIER TODAY WERE DEFINITELY NOT OLD!!
THERE HAS TO BE ANOTHER COUPLE IN THERE!
WILL YOU GET AHOLD OF YOURSELF?! I WANT TO GO TO BED!
WELL, EXCUSE ME!
YOU WERE COMPLETELY USELESS TODAY.
FINE...
FINE, THEN!

IT'S BEEN TEN DAYS SINCE THEY MOVED NEXT DOOR...
YET THEY STILL HAVEN'T EVEN PUT UP THEIR DOOR NAMEPLATE?
ちら
GLANCE
TIPTOE...
THAT COUPLE IS DEFINITELY... MOST DEFINITELY STRANGE!
ガチャ
DOOR OPEN
!
.....
.....
OH, GRANNY!
WERE YOU HERE THIS WHOLE TIME?
WHAT...?

WE'LL ALL GET OLD SOME DAY...
IT'S NOTHING TO GET SO WORKED UP ABOUT ...
PEOPLE OF THE FUTURE
IT'S BECAUSE THAT OLD MAN IS SENILE!
STILL!!! ISN'T IT A BIT MUCH?! I'M TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OLD AND HE TOOK ME FOR AN OLD WOMAN!
I'M STILL YOUNG! DON'T PUT ME IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS YOU!
BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU'RE GONNA BECOME AN OLD WOMAN, TOO!
ARE YOU TRYING TO PICK A FIGHT?!
COME TO THINK OF IT, THAT OLD WOMAN KIND OF REMINDED ME OF YOU IN A WAY...
BANG!
AH!

ANGRY.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?!
THESE BOOKS ARE IMPORTANT! DON'T TAKE IT OUT ON THEM!
THUMP!
WHUMP WHUMP
ACK!
LOOK AT THIS ROOM!
I CLEAN AND CLEAN, BUT THIS PLACE NEVER GETS CLEANED UP BECAUSE OF YOUR BOOKS!
THESE "IMPORTANT BOOKS" OF YOURS ARE NOTHING BUT A NUISANCE TO ME!
I NEED THEM FOR MY WORK!
YOU HAVE A HOLIDAY AND ALL YOU DO IS READ BOOKS IN THE MORNING!
THAT WAY, YOU CAN PRETEND TO WORK ALL YOU WANT!
WE'LL JUST NEVER GO OUT TOGETHER SOMEPLACE NICE LIKE OTHER COUPLES DO!
GACHUNK!

IF YOU KEEP COMPLAINING LIKE THIS, WE'RE THROUGH!
IT WAS A MISTAKE TO EVEN MARRY YOU IN THE FIRST PLACE!
OH, REALLY? THAT'D BE A HUGE RELIEF FOR ME!
I... FEEL LIKE... I'VE HEARD THAT SOMEWHERE BEFORE...
WHAT... WAS THAT JUST NOW?
THOSE LINES WERE SAID IN A DIFFERENT ORDER, THOUGH...

むっくり
ABRUPTLY
!
YOU SAID IT WAS A BULKY, USELESS PIECE OF JUNK!
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! A FRIEND GAVE THAT TO ME!
HOW... HOW DID YOU KNOW THAT I WAS ABOUT TO BREAK THIS?
WHA-... WHAT'S HAPPENING?
UH...

.....
BEFORE...
THE SAME THING...
HAPPENED NEXT DOOR...
HEH HEH HEH HEH
EXACTLY!
AND THEY SAY THAT COUPLES CAN TELL WHAT THEIR PARTNER IS THINKING, SO...
A SIMILAR CONVERSATION COULD'VE HAPPENED ANYWHERE...
IT WAS JUST A RANDOM COINCI-DENCE!
HA HAooo
UH, YEAH... THAT SOUNDS... THAT SOUNDS GOOD...
AHEM
UH... HOW ABOUT WE GO FOR A WALK...?

SEE! IF YOU DON'T SMOOTH OUT ALL THE WRINKLES, IT WILL LOOK OUT OF SHAPE WHEN IT DRIES!
.....
SO WE SHOULDN'T FIGHT TOO MUCH AND TRY TO GET ALONG...
RATTLE
ガラ
RATTLE
BUT, WE'RE A COUPLE...
I'M NOT VERY GENTLE, SO I START TO COMPLAIN BY MISTAKE...
WELL, HE'S NOT WRONG ABOUT THAT, THAT'S FOR SURE...
PAT
PAT
!

COULD IT BE THE NEXT DOOR COUPLE'S FAMILY...
H-HELLO...
HELLO! NICE WEATHER TODAY, ISN'T IT?
HMM?
OH, YOU MEAN HER?
UH... WHERE'S THE OLD COUPLE?
HOW ABOUT YOU COME OVER FOR SOME TEA?
NIKO NIKO
SMILE
TODAY, SHE WENT OUT TO BUY CLOTHES FOR OUR KID!
.....

AND TO TOP IT OFF, THERE'S NOBODY AROUND EXCEPT A MAN I'VE NEVER MET BEFORE...
S-SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU...
THIS CAN'T BE GOOD...
JUST ENTERING INTO THEIR HOUSE WHEN THEY AREN'T HOME...
NOT AT ALL! PLEASE MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME, ALTHOUGH IT IS A LITTLE CLUTTERED.
BUT I MIGHT BE ABLE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THAT STRANGE COUPLE...
HUH?!
WHAT'S WRONG?
NOTHING...
THIS PLACE JUST REMINDS ME A LITTLE OF OURS...
THE FURNITURE IS ARRANGED THE SAME...

HAHAHA!
SUCH A PITY TO HEAR THAT!
THIS DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A FIRST-TIME MEETING FOR SOME REASON...
BUT THE BOOKS WE HAVE AREN'T THERE FOR HIM TO READ. IT'S HIS HOBBY TO BUY THEM!
EVEN THIS MAN...
MY WIFE HATES IT A LOT...
BECAUSE OF MY WORK, WE JUST KEEP GETTING MORE AND MORE BOOKS...
REALLY? OUR PLACE IS THE EXACT SAME WAY!
BUT...
AND WHY EXACTLY IS THIS MAN ACTING LIKE HE'S THE TENANT OF THIS PLACE?
WHERE'D THE OLD MAN GO?

SHWIP!
AHH! I-I'M SO SORRY!
DON'T WORRY! ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
IT CAN'T BE...
CLATTER
NOW WHERE DID THAT TOWEL GO...?
AH, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT!
I'LL, UH... JUST GO HOME AND CHANGE!
RUSTLE
I WOULDN'T THINK OF IT! JUST GIVE ME A SECOND...

TAP
HERE! I FOUND A TOWEL, GRANNY!
JUST BECAUSE HE LOOKS NICE DOESN'T MEAN THAT I KNOW WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE IS...
I BETTER GET OUT OF HERE WHILE I STILL CAN...
TIPTOE

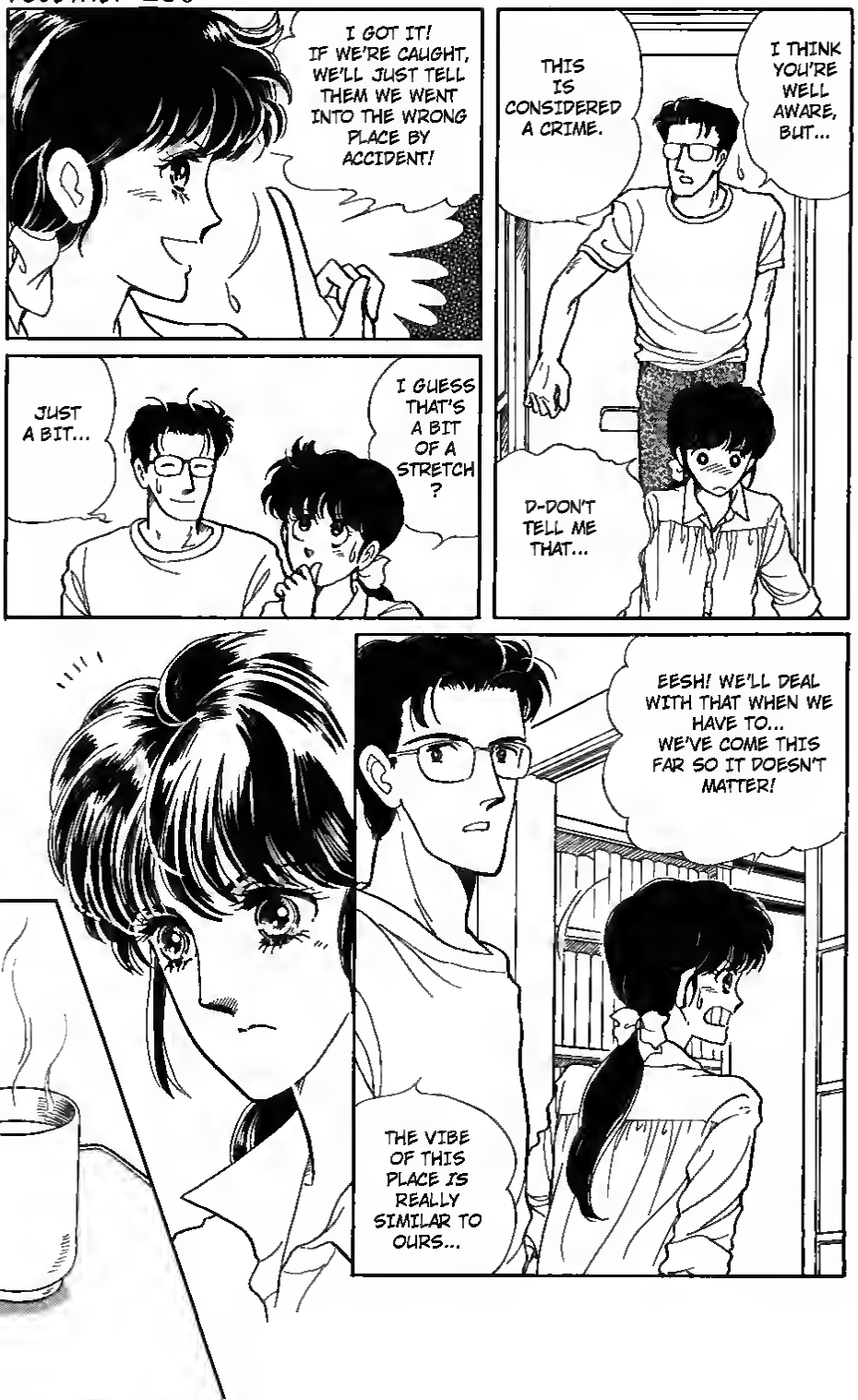
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE NOT JUST TIRED...?
I'M TELLING YOU! THEY SWAPPED PLACES WITH EACH OTHER OR SOMETHING!!!

TODAY THEY TAKE OUT THE NON-BURNABLE GARBAGE!
WHAT NOW?
……!
RUSTLE
CLATTER
IT LOOKS LIKE THE SUPER IS TALKING WITH THE OLD WOMAN NEXT DOOR!
WOW, YOU TWO ARE GOING ON VACATION?
AREN'T YOU TWO LUCKY TO GET ALONG SO WELL AT YOUR AGE!
I'M JEALOUS!
HO HO HO HO
GET AHOLD OF YOURSELF ALREADY! GEESH!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
IF I GO NOW, I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE WHO SHE IS ONCE AND FOR ALL!
WELL! WHY ARE YOU SO OUT OF BREATH?!
PANT!
PANT!
PANT!
……
THE PICK UP TRUCK HASN'T COME YET, YOU KNOW?
THUD!

HEY... THEY'RE TEN YEARS APART LIKE YOU AND YOUR HUSBAND!
HER HUSBAND IS AROUND EIGHTY.
AH, HER! SHE'S ABOUT SEVENTY YEARS OLD, BUT SHE'S STILL VERY ENERGETIC!
GARBAGE COLLECTION DAYS
SHIKAWA CITY
BURNABLE GARBAGE
NON-BURNABLE GARBAGE
WHERE'S THE OLD WOMAN WHO LIVES NEXT DOOR?
GOOD MORNING!
OH, OKAY! SEE YOU AT DINNER!
WELL, I'M OFF TO WORK!
ABOUT THE SAME AS ANY OTHER COMPANY EMPLOYEE, ACTUALLY.
HE MUST BE REALLY SMART!
YOU SAID HE WORKS AT A LABORATORY WHERE THEY INVENT THINGS, RIGHT?
SURE ENOUGH... SOMETHING IS UP...
AH, I MEAN! OH, MY!
I DON'T ALWAYS WATCH WHAT THEY'RE DOING OR ANYTHING!
HOHOHO!
BY THE WAY, THERE WAS A MIDDLE-AGED MAN IN THAT OLD COUPLE'S PLACE YESTERDAY...
WHISPER
OH? I DIDN'T NOTICE. WE CAN SEE FROM OUR PLACE IF SOMEONE WERE TO COME!

SO...
DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE NOT GONNA STOP TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHO THE NEXT DOOR PEOPLE ARE?
IF SO, THEN YOU'RE NOT THAT DIFFERENT FROM THE SUPER-INTENDENT.
WELL, THE TENANTS IN THE OTHER ROOMS HAVE ALL SEEN THAT COUPLE!
SINCE I'M THE ONLY PERSON THAT HASN'T MET THIS OLD LADY, I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT SHE'S AVOIDING ME!
I'M GONNA GO AND SETTLE THIS!
OKAY, OKAY... DO WHAT YOU MUST...
I'LL JOIN YOU IN THIS ASSAULT.
IT'S A "VISIT"!

SILENCE...
.....
DING DONG!
DING DONG!
THEY HAVE TO BE HOME! I'M SURE OF IT!
I COULD SEE THEIR LIGHTS TURNED ON FROM THE VERANDA.
MAYBE THEY'RE NOT HOME...
ER...
IT'S... OPEN.
TWIST.
BUT... I DON'T HEAR A SOUND...
YOU'RE RIGHT...


I GOT IT! IF WE'RE CAUGHT, WE'LL JUST TELL THEM WE WENT INTO THE WRONG PLACE BY ACCIDENT!
I THINK YOU'RE WELL AWARE, BUT...
THIS IS CONSIDERED A CRIME.
D-DON'T TELL ME THAT...
I GUESS THAT'S A BIT OF A STRETCH?
JUST A BIT...
EESH! WE'LL DEAL WITH THAT WHEN WE HAVE TO... WE'VE COME THIS FAR SO IT DOESN'T MATTER!
THE VIBE OF THIS PLACE IS REALLY SIMILAR TO OURS...

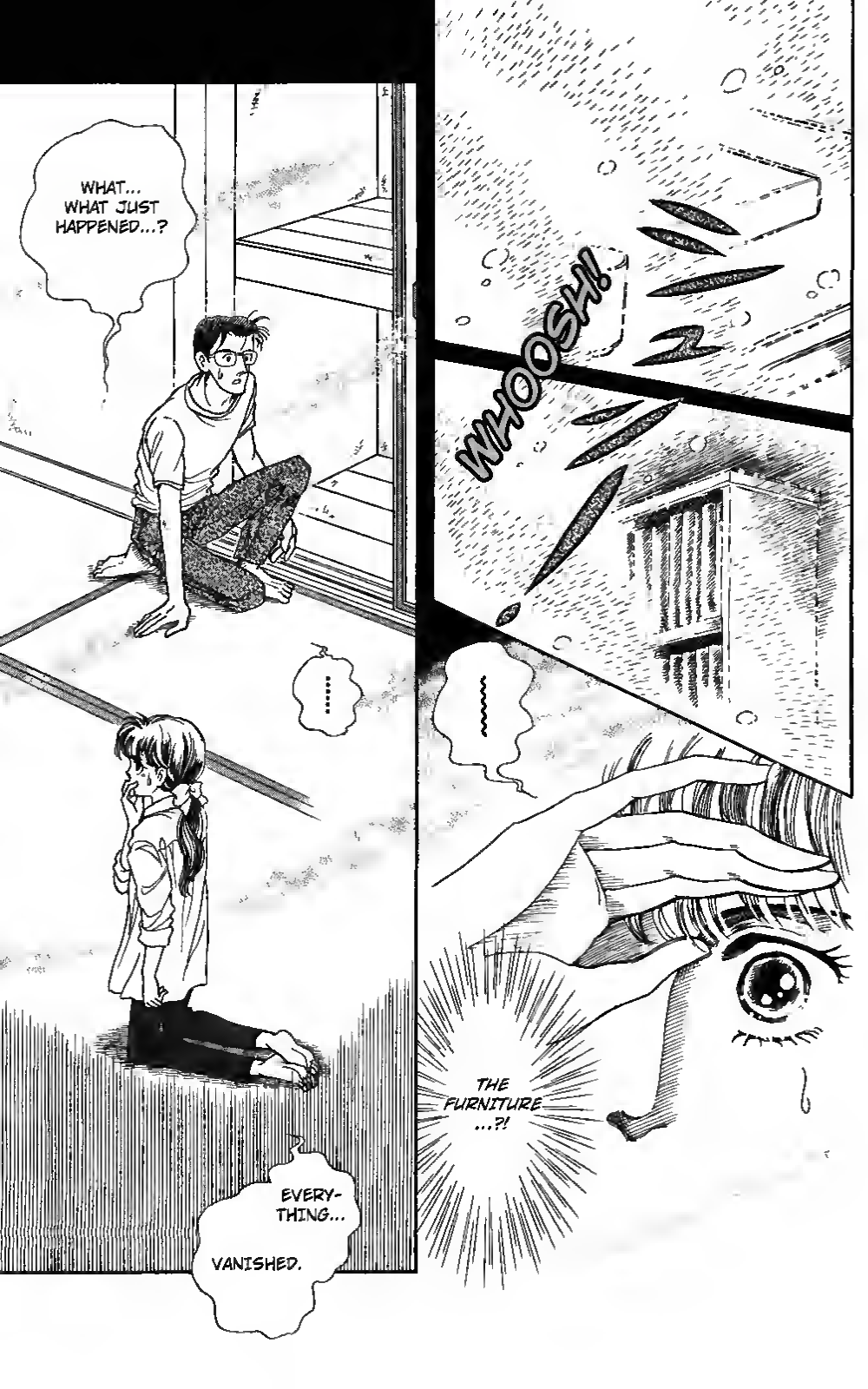
ALBUM
IT'S STILL WARM.
THE FLOOR CUSHIONS FEEL LIKE THEY'VE JUST BEEN USED.
ALBU
LOOKS LIKE THE TWO OF THEM WERE GOING THROUGH THEIR PHOTO ALBUM.
WHERE ON EARTH DID THEY DISAPPEAR?
PHOTO ALBUM?
I JUST WANT TO SEE THE WOMAN'S FACE!
HEY! DON'T JUST LOOK AT STUFF LIKE THAT!

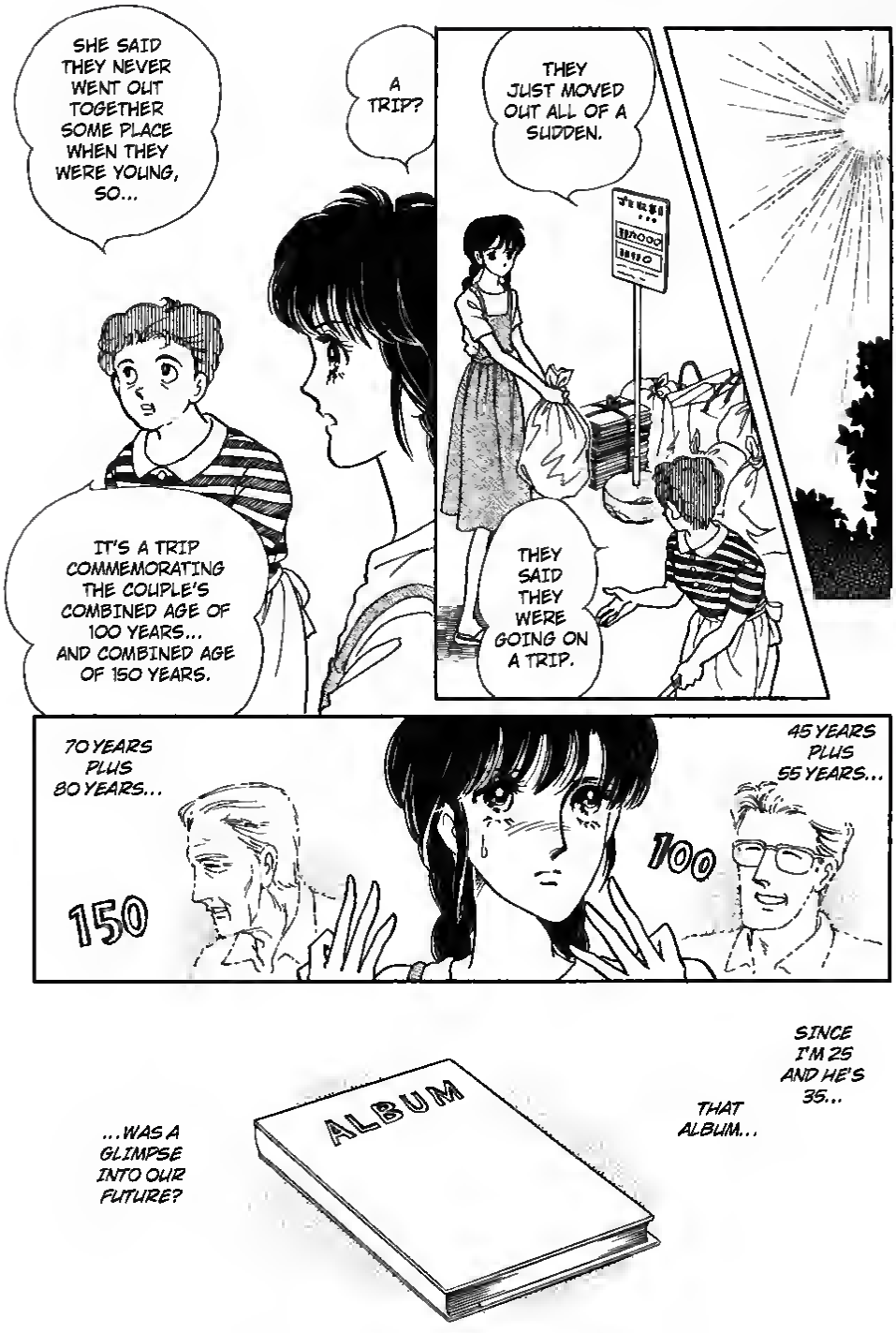
.....
NO WAY...
WHY...
ARE...
OUR PHOTOS ...?

HEY! IT'S HIM...
HE'S THE ONE WHO WAS IN THE APARTMENT THE OTHER DAY!
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
.....
AND THIS...
HE'S THE OLD MAN!
FLIP
THEN... THIS PERSON IS THE OLD WOMAN...
... WE SHOULD STOP.
HUH?
BUT THERE'S ONLY A FEW MORE PHOTOS.

MAYBE THOSE PHOTOS...
ARE THE ONES THAT SHOULDN'T BE LOOKING AT...
ROAAAR
OKAY...

GWOOO
WHA- WHAT'S THAT NOISE?!
GWOOOONG!
IT'S COMING FROM THE CLOSET!
WATCH OUT...!
THRUST
AHHH!
FLASH!
EEEK!


WHAT... WHAT JUST HAPPENED...?
WHOOSH!
.....
~~~
THE FURNITURE ...?!
EVERY-THING...
VANISHED.
~~~


SHE SAID THEY NEVER WENT OUT TOGETHER SOME PLACE WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG, SO...
A TRIP?
IT'S A TRIP COMMEMORATING THE COUPLE'S COMBINED AGE OF 100 YEARS... AND COMBINED AGE OF 150 YEARS.
THEY JUST MOVED OUT ALL OF A SUDDEN.
THEY SAID THEY WERE GOING ON A TRIP.
70 YEARS PLUS 80 YEARS...
150
45 YEARS PLUS 55 YEARS...
100
SINCE I'M 25 AND HE'S 35...
THAT ALBUM...
ALBUM
...WAS A GLIMPSE INTO OUR FUTURE?

THEN WE'LL HAPPILY TIME TRAVEL WHEN THE TIME COMES.
WELL, IF THAT IS THE TRUTH...
HEHE... THAT WOULD BE NICE.
NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE ARGUE, WE'RE STILL GOING TO BE TOGETHER UNTIL THAT AGE, HUH?
DEEP IN THOUGHT...
(ふ)
(ふ)
...
45 MORE YEARS...
IF YOU THINK TOO DEEPLY, YOUR HEAD WILL SPIN...
SO THAT MEANS...
BUT... I ENDED UP GETTING A QUICK LOOK...
.....
THE LAST PHOTO IN THAT ALBUM...
WAS A PHOTO TAKEN OF A CHEERY OLD WOMAN...
ALONE.
◆END◆

JOUR COMICS
WONDER! ②
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